The Times History

of

The War in South Africa

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LORD ROBERTS AND SIR ALFRED MILNER

WITH SOME STAFF OFFICERS.

The Times History

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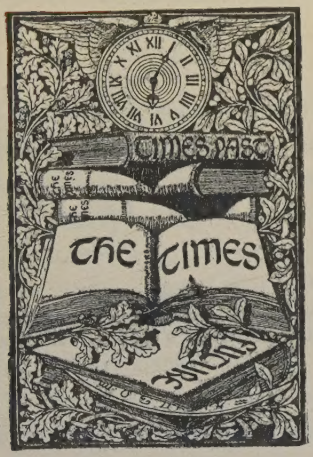
1899–1902



General Editor: L. S. Amery

Fellow of All Souls

Vol. IV.

Edited by Basil Williams

Formerly Scholar of New College

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

In the preceding volume the narrative of the South African Campaign was carried on from the close of the "Black Week" down to Lord Roberts's entry into Bloemfontein—from the depth of defeat to, perhaps, the most signal and complete moment of triumph in the war. The present volume covers the rest of the operations conducted under the chief command of Lord Roberts. It is a period, viewed broadly, of almost continuous success. In it Lord Roberts's victorious armies march from end to end of the republics, occupy all the chief towns, and make themselves masters of the whole system of railways; it opens with wholesale surrenders of burghers and closes with the dispersal of the last organised Boer army. Yet that success is from time to time marred by regrettable minor incidents, and, as the event proved, it lacked the quality of completeness. The essential object of all war, the imposition of the will of one people upon another by breaking its spirit of resistance, was not attained. Crushing and conclusive victory in the field alone could have achieved that result. But was such victory attainable? Was it excluded from the first by the inherent characteristics of the campaign, by the mobility of the Boers, by their disinclination to make any determined stand? Or must we infer that, in the comparatively easy and successful accomplishment of what after all are only secondary means of attaining the great object of war—the capture of positions, the occupation of capitals,

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the control of communications and material resources—means, moreover, whose efficacy must vary greatly according to the adversary's military, economic, and political organisation—the only primary and certain means, the destruction of the enemy's forces, was too much left out of sight or only half-heartedly essayed? It is for the reader to judge for himself: this volume will supply him with ample material for his judgment.

The composition of the present volume differs from that of its predecessors to the extent that, whereas in the former volumes the actual narrative as it appeared, though based on the contributions of various collaborators, was mainly written by myself, I have in the present case confined myself strictly to the purely editorial task of criticism and suggestion. The volume as it stands is the work of Mr. Basil Williams, and he is responsible alike for the accuracy of the detailed facts recorded and for the judgments and criticisms expressed. This delegation of a difficult, laborious, and responsible task has made it possible to publish, within a year of its predecessor, a volume which it has taken fully two years of continuous effort to write.

L. S. AMERY.

THE TEMPLE, *May* 13, 1906.

PREFACE

My chief duty in this preface is to offer my thanks to the collaborators who have made my task possible. For Chapters XV. and XVI., on the sieges of Ladysmith and Kimberley, which, but for considerations of space, would have appeared in Volume III., Mr. Amery is entirely responsible; both chapters in their original form were the work of Mr. Lionel James.

To Mr. James I am also indebted for the original draft of the account of the Sannah's Post incident; to Mr. S. T. Sheppard for similar work on Chapter XVII.; and to two officers, who prefer to remain anonymous, for the original drafts of Chapters IV., VIII., XI., and XIII. Colonel A. Paris, R.M.A., kindly assisted me with Chapter VI., and to Mr. William Corner I am grateful for useful information on Chapter VII. Chapter V. is almost exactly as it came from the hands of Lord Lucas, known to readers of former volumes as Mr. Bron Herbert.

With regard to the maps, I am indebted to Lieutenant P. O. G. Usborne, R.E., for those of Houtnek, of the De Wet Hunt and of the Jammersberg Bridge Position; to Captain M. C. Richards, of the 2nd Wiltshire Regiment, for the sketches of Retief's and Slabbert's Neks; and to an R.E. officer, who is unwilling to have his name mentioned, for the maps of the Brandwater Basin and of the Operations round Johannesburg. Captain S. Lloyd Owen, R.E., and Major

C. B. Simonds, R.A., have also assisted with maps. To Lord Charles Bentinck I owe thanks for his permission to copy the plan of Fort Ayr in his possession.

To my colleagues, Mr. Erskine Childers and Mr. G. I. MacAlister, I am grateful for much good counsel, and to Mr. G. P. Tallboy for most careful and ungrudging work in the preparation of maps and plans, and in revision. I have been most fortunate in the courtesy and willingness to give advice and information shown by almost all the officers and others chiefly concerned in the events described, as well as in suggestions from several of those who were at the time fighting against us.

Without Mr. Amery himself, who before I began had planned the volume and collected the bulk of the material for it, and who has always been ready with information and with help, the work would have been impossible.

Lastly, in laying down my pen after two years of work, which has been very pleasant to me, I should like to say that my chief hope is that nothing in this volume will be otherwise than useful to the best interests of the British Army, in which I once had the honour to serve.

BASIL WILLIAMS.

THE TEMPLE, *May* 14, 1906.

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The Times History

OF

THE WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA

CHAPTER I

THE HALT AT BLOEMFONTEIN

I

THE fortnight which followed Lord Roberts's entry into Bloemfontein on March 13th was the most triumphant period of his campaign. All and more than all that he had hoped from his great flank advance had been attained; the Boers were not merely defeated, they were in headlong rout. In the north of Cape Colony the chief anxiety of the invading commandos was to retire without falling into the enemy's hands; the rebels were quietly returning to their farms; Kimberley and Ladysmith were saved; nearly half the Free State was at Lord Roberts's mercy; and the capital itself, except for a few sullen patriots, seemed actually to welcome the conqueror.* In a short month Lord Roberts had cleared the whole vast country south of a five hundred mile line extending from the Indian Ocean through Ladysmith and Bloemfontein to Kimberley; in February the Boers had been calmly waiting for Ladysmith and Kimberley to fall into their hands, and were giving laws at ease to districts belonging to the Queen; now all those within reach of a British column were submissively giving in arms and returning to their farms under Lord Roberts's proclamation of

Lord Roberts's favourable position on entering Bloemfontein, March 13th.

* President Steyn's brother accepted a contract for supplying Lord Roberts's army with wood fuel, and the President's brother-in-law one for slaughter cattle.

protection. Two days after the occupation of Bloemfontein General Pole-Carew was sent down the line with two battalions of the Guards and a battery to see that the way was clear and to give a hand to Generals Clements and Gatacre as they crossed into the Free State by Norval's Pont and Bethulie respectively. He met with no opposition, and heard at Edenburg that the former invaders of Cape Colony were hurrying off as fast as they could towards the Basutoland border. Gatacre and Clements likewise were unopposed after crossing the Orange River, and Clements, who was told off to patrol the country west of the railway on his way to Bloemfontein, had an almost triumphal progress through Philippolis, Jagersfontein, Fauresmith, Koffyfontein, and Petrusburg, receiving arms and surrenders and taking over the official buildings and documents. From all parts during this first fortnight came the same story of tranquillity. In the west, as Methuen occupied Boshof and Warrenton, the Boers in large numbers retired before him; and on the east Buller's army was given every opportunity of recuperating undisturbed. In the north-western districts alone of Cape Colony the rebellion had not been entirely suppressed when Lord Roberts entered Bloemfontein, but before the end of the month, Lord Kitchener's and General Settle's vigorous action had removed all anxiety in that quarter.

The Prieska district the only disturbed area.

This rebellion * had for a time assumed serious proportions. The original force of Transvaal and Free State Boers, sent by Cronje in January to stir up the revolt, had numbered only two hundred men with two guns, but by the beginning of March the effect of this small force had been considerable. Liebenberg, the general in command, or one of his lieutenants, had visited all the principal villages in the districts immediately south of the Orange River, the loyal magistrates had been deposed, several of the districts had been formally annexed to the Free State and were being administered by committees of rebels, and arms had been distributed to the rebels, who welcomed the invaders in crowds. In the district of Prieska alone, out of six hundred men capable of bearing arms, no less than four hundred had

Progress of the Prieska rebellion since January.

* For earlier notices of this rebellion, see vol. iii., pp. 493, 570, and 594.

joined the rebellion. Thus, when Lord Roberts was approaching Bloemfontein, Liebenberg could muster about a thousand men in his laager at Houwater, about fifty miles west of De Aar, Andries de Wet and Jooste seven hundred at Kenhardt and Upington, and Steenekamp a large force at Prieska. The rebel area, though large, was not in itself of very great importance, as it is sparsely inhabited and, except in the actual neighbourhood of the Orange River, arid, like the rest of the Karroo plateau, of which it forms part. There were, however, two dangers in this widespread rebellion, as Sir Alfred Milner had always seen. First, the railway was co-terminous with the eastern border of the area affected, and was therefore liable to attack from rebel bands, especially at the important railway junction of De Aar, through which at one time all stores for the main army had to pass; and secondly, if the rebellion were not suppressed it might well spread to the neighbouring districts of the colony.

Settle's measures to deal with it.

Before Paardeberg, Lord Roberts had already ordered three small columns to be formed by General Settle, the commander at Orange River Station, to check the course of the rebellion. The western column, about 450 strong * under Colonel Sir Charles Parsons, was to march on Carnarvon and Kenhardt from Victoria West; Colonel Adye was to concentrate the centre column, about 550 † strong, at Britstown and advance on Houwater; while Settle himself was to take the right-hand column, which numbered about 600,‡ due west from Orange River Station to clear the river banks, hold the drifts, and cut off Liebenberg. On the 6th March Parsons occupied Carnarvon and Settle had obtained touch with Steenekamp's force at Zoutpan, between Hopetown and Prieska.

Adye's repulse at Houwater on 6th March.

Adye was not so fortunate. On the same day he came up to Liebenberg's position at Houwater, in the centre of a semicircle of hills. Though inferior in numbers, he proceeded to

* 3 cos. New Zealand M.I., 1 coy. W. Australian M.I., and a Canadian field battery.

† 3 cos. M.I., 2 cos. C.I.V. infantry, and a field battery.

‡ 2 cos. M.I., 300 Orpen's Horse, a battery of the Royal Australian Artillery, and a detachment of the C.I.V. cyclists.

attack, but without securing his flanks, so that Liebenberg was able to surround him and cause him to beat a hasty retreat on Britstown with a loss of twenty-one men.

Kitchener sent to take command.

As soon as Roberts heard of Adye's repulse, he took vigorous measures to suppress the rebellion, of which he now saw the serious possibilities. Luckily, by the 8th March his own immediate difficulties were greatly reduced. The action at Poplar Grove had shown him that there was very little fight left in the Boers between himself and Bloemfontein, while Clements had driven those at Norval's Pont over the river, and Gatacre was approaching Bethulie. It was possible therefore to send Kitchener to take command of the operations in the west. Strong reinforcements were also sent up from Cape Town.

Kitchener's occupation of Prieska, March 18th.

Kitchener decided to accompany the Britstown column himself after it had been augmented by reinforcements to about 3,000.* His plan was the same as Settle's; for his own and Settle's columns, by converging on Prieska, were to attempt to cut off the retreat of Liebenberg's and Steenekamp's forces over the Orange River, while Parsons was at the same time to advance on Kenhardt. But the Boer leaders were not disposed to be caught. Liebenberg retreated precipitately from Houwater, where he was in danger of having Kitchener in front of him and Settle on his rear. At first, indeed, he showed an inclination to defend the road where it crosses Doornberg Nek, about thirty miles from Prieska. But when Kitchener had come up to within ten miles of him at Omdraai Vley, west of the Brak River, while Settle was already holding the drifts in his rear, he again gave up his position and fled through Prieska over the Orange River. Kitchener, on the 18th March, made a forced march of forty miles with his mounted troops, only to find that the Boers had just left Prieska; but the horses after their long ride were too tired for further pursuit. His communications with Settle during the march from

* The reinforcements consisted of a battalion of the Suffolks, the 7th Dragoon Guards, the Oxford, Stafford, Lancashire, Cheshire, Suffolk, Hampshire, and Warwick companies of Imperial Yeomanry, and a squadron each of Nesbitt's and Kitchener's Horse.

Britstown had been well kept up by a small detachment of C.I.V. cyclists, who carried despatches through country held by the rebels with a courage and skill reflecting much credit on these comparatively untrained volunteers. Settle, acting on his instructions, had first cleared away Steenekamp's men from Zoutpan, and then, after holding the drifts over the Orange River north of Kitchener, had joined him in Prieska on the 21st. By that date Parsons had reached Van Wyk's Vley, half way to Kenhardt.

Settle resumes command

When he had seen Settle in Prieska, Kitchener returned to the railway with most of the reinforcements that he had brought up. There was not much spirit left in the rebellion now that the principal leaders, Liebenberg and Steenekamp, had crossed the Orange, and were making their way to the Transvaal, but there were still some rebels left in the outlying districts south of the river. The task of bringing these to order was left to Settle. Keeping a garrison,* under Colonel Adye, in Prieska, and ordering Parsons to occupy Kenhardt, he himself advanced on the 22nd March with 1,000 men† towards Upington, about a hundred and fifty miles lower down the Orange. On the way to Upington, he left a detachment of Orpen's Horse, under Captain Green,‡ to guard the important pont at Koegas, near Draghoender, thus forestalling any inclination of the rebels to double back over the Orange and close in upon his rear. At this stage Settle was almost forced to return, as his supplies were running short, and the country was barren. Fortunately he heard from his intelligence officer, Colonel Sam Hughes, a member of the Canadian Parliament, that the Upington district, ninety miles further on, contained plenty of supplies; he therefore sent Hughes forward with a small band of scouts to collect them. Hughes covered the ninety miles before him in a forced march, and

* Suffolks, Nesbitt's Horse, 44th Battery.

† 2 battalions I.Y. under Col. Burke, Gloucester M.I., Suffolk M.I., Kitchener's Horse, Orpen's Light Horse, 1 battery Royal Australian Artillery.

‡ This detachment showed great gallantry in beating off a party of Boers who attempted to recross the Orange River at the pont and fall upon Settle's rear.

was so successful in giving the impression of having a large force immediately behind him, that Jooste and his men retreated across the Orange through Griqualand West to the Transvaal. Kenhardt was similarly occupied by a detachment of Colonel Parsons's force; and when Settle reached Upington, on April 3rd, there was nothing left to do but arrange about the policing of the disaffected districts. The Transvaalers and Free Staters, and many of the prominent rebels, had escaped to the districts north of the Orange River; but the whole of the rebel war committee was captured, including the Rev. Mr. Schroeder, the Bond member of parliament for the district. Arms were collected, prominent prisoners were detained in custody, and the less important rebels were laid under an obligation to come up for trial if required. Small garrisons were left in Upington, Kenhardt, Draghoender, and Prieska, and a force of 150 Bastard scouts, under European officers, was organised to assist in patrolling the districts. Then Settle returned to Cape Town to resume his work as Inspector-General of the lines of communication, and the rest of his troops were drafted off to Bloemfontein.

and occupies Upington on April 3rd.

End of the rebellion.

The prompt suppression of this rebellion was very useful, as its continuance might have interfered with Lord Roberts's advance, and spread rebellion further. The sympathisers with the republics also received a lesson as to the worthlessness of the protection offered them by their republican allies; for as soon as the Transvaal and Free State Boers found themselves in danger, they promptly left in the lurch the men whose disloyalty they had encouraged and turned to their own advantage. The lesson was effective, for although the districts were never entirely free from disaffection, after this there was no real rising, even when de Wet, a year later, visited them in his abortive expedition to Cape Colony.

Pacification of the district.

It is scarcely surprising that, with these indications of a general pacification, Lord Roberts should have fully expected to be able, after a very short period of rest and preparation at Bloemfontein, to start forward again and complete the demoralization of the Boers before they had time to recover

Roberts's hopes of an early start for Pretoria

their spirits. He was determined to carry on his victorious march to Pretoria with the least possible delay, and was already hoping to be in Kroonstad early in April. If he could do that, he calculated, quite justly, that it would be difficult for their leaders ever to bring them to another sustained effort. Nevertheless, to some of his advisers, this tranquillity seemed ominous, and there were not even wanting some signs that the Boers still meditated resistance to his further advance. Chief of these was the orderly retreat of the large force of Boers who had invaded Cape Colony. As early as March 16th Pole-Carew found at Edenburg, on his way to meet Gatacre and Clements, that he had just missed Grobler's contingent proceeding north-east. This was only the first of two parties escaping from Colesberg, the second being under Lemmer, while Du Plessis and Olivier were leading a third party in the same direction from Bethulie and Aliwal North. When the three parties united in the neighbourhood of Ladybrand, they formed the imposing total of 5,500 Boers, 1,000 Kaffirs, 10,000 oxen, and 800 wagons, covering a total extent of twenty-four miles on the march. After proceeding further north along the Basuto border, they again separated, and took up positions to the east and north-east of Bloemfontein, having suffered no losses of any kind except those due to exhaustion. As soon as Pole-Carew heard of Grobler's movements, on the 16th, he urged upon the Commander-in-chief the advisability of sending out a strong force east of Bloemfontein to intercept the Boer commandos as they came up from the south, and of bringing Brabant from Aliwal North, and Gatacre from Springfontein, to close in upon their rear. But, in the first place, it is doubtful if Lord Roberts could have cornered this force, even if he had sent a large column in pursuit as soon as he got Pole-Carew's first message from Edenburg on the 16th; for by the 17th the main body, under Grobler and Lemmer, were at Modderpoort, due east of Bloemfontein. Moreover, even if there were more chances than appeared of coming up with these Boers, Lord Roberts was hardly in a position to send out a force sufficient to annihilate them so soon after his arrival in Bloemfontein.

in spite of some ominous signs.

Orderly retreat of Olivier, Grobler, and Lemmer from Cape Colony.

Both men and horses, after the fighting and marching of the last month, required rest and reinforcement; he could not have hoped to surround and capture the retreating commandos unless he had sent out at least half the force of 34,000 with which he entered Bloemfontein, and even if he could have sent out sufficient supplies with these troops, it would have been a very grave risk to leave only 15,000 tired troops for the defence of Bloemfontein and the line to the south.

Roberts's optimism.

But, although Lord Roberts may have been justified for these reasons in refusing to send out an expedition against Olivier at this stage, he undoubtedly formed this decision chiefly on the very mistaken belief that there was no more fight left in the Boers, and that if only they were allowed quietly to disperse they would return to their pastoral and agricultural pursuits. In this instance Lord Roberts showed that though he possessed the great merit of knowing his own mind, he was less well-equipped with the corresponding quality, equally necessary in a general, of being able to divine his enemy's attitude of mind. At any rate, the ready submission of the Boers in the vicinity of his main armies encouraged him in the dangerous policy which was then inaugurated of sending out small isolated detachments to occupy towns, post up proclamations, and receive arms. He apparently expected that the mere presence of the British flag and a few troops would ensure the protection which he promised in his proclamations to all who willingly gave in their submission.*

Policy of sending out small parties to receive surrenders, etc.

Waterworks occupied, March 15th.

One of Lord Roberts's first cares was to secure the waterworks which supplied Bloemfontein, situated at Sannah's Post on the Modder River, twenty-one miles due east of the capital. For this purpose a somewhat inadequate force of 300 M.I. under Major Amphlett was sent out on the 15th. Two days later another expedition was sent to Thaba 'Nchu, twenty-one miles further east. As Olivier was known to

* On March 21st Lord Roberts telegraphed to the War Office:—"So many burghers have expressed their desire to surrender under the terms of the last proclamation that I have sent small columns in various directions to register the names and take over arms."

be in that neighbourhood, this column, which was entirely mounted, was stronger than most of those sent out about the same time, and the command of it was given to General French. But even this column was only 1,500 strong, and was obviously only capable of reconnoitring Olivier's dispositions should he show any inclination to fight.* Expedition to Thaba 'Nchu, March 17th.

Beyond a communication post at Springfield, eight miles east of Bloemfontein, and Amphlett's companies of M.I. at Sannah's Post, French had no connecting links with the main army when he arrived at Thaba 'Nchu on March 20th. However, the attitude of the people of Thaba 'Nchu was friendly in the extreme, and seemed to support the general impression that the Free State was desirous of peace. They readily gave information of the movements of Olivier's force, which they reported to be in the neighbourhood of Dewetsdorp. As the country seemed so peaceful, a small force of mounted infantry and a squadron of the 10th Hussars, under the command of Colonel Pilcher, was detached to occupy some flour mills on the Leeuw River, twenty-three miles east of Thaba 'Nchu. Pilcher occupied the mills without opposition on March 21st. But throughout the march he found evidences of an enemy, and on arrival at the mills he made the discovery that Olivier's force, the third of the parties retreating from Cape Colony, instead of being near Dewetsdorp as reported, was encamped on the far side of Commissie Poort, a defile eight miles south-east of the mills. For the next five days the situation of Pilcher's little column was precarious. Barely 200 strong, it practically lay across the path of a force of Boers which could have engulfed it at any moment. But, influenced by insufficient information con- Pilcher comes across Olivier.

* French's column consisted of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, Alderson's Brigade of Mounted Infantry, and Rochfort's Brigade Division of Royal Horse Artillery. The detailed composition of the column was as follows:—170 sabres 10th Hussars, and 130 sabres Household Cavalry, under General Broadwood; the 3rd Battalion of Mounted Infantry, Rimington's Guides, one squadron of the New Zealand Mounted Infantry, Burma Mounted Infantry, and Roberts's Horse, all under Colonel Alderson; and Q and U Batteries, Royal Horse Artillery. On paper, of course, this force was much larger than the number given above, but the loss of horses on the march to Bloemfontein had reduced most units to a skeleton condition.

cerning the British force at Thaba 'Nchu and Bloemfontein, and by fictitious reports which Pilcher himself skilfully spread with regard to his detachment, Olivier determined to avoid rather than crush him, in order to bring his convoy past Ladybrand. He halted a day, and then, abandoning the Commissie Poort route, took a less used road nearer the Caledon River. During this period Pilcher was in constant heliographic communication with Maseru, whence he received direct information of the Boer movements, and by his advanced position proved of great use as a screen to Thaba 'Nchu.

Makes a raid on Ladybrand.

Later, on hearing that Olivier, avoiding Ladybrand, had arrived near Clocolan, twenty miles further to the north-east, and that the attitude of the Ladybrand residents was wavering between peace and war, Pilcher took two-thirds of his men for a flying descent upon that town. But he only had time to raid the court-house and make prisoners of the landdrost and field-cornet before he found that Olivier had detached a strong commando to reconnoitre, and if feasible dispute the occupation of Thaba 'Nchu with French. As this commando approached, Pilcher had just time to escape to the covering force he had on the Platberg outside Ladybrand and make good his escape to Leeuw River with his prisoners.

Gatacre also sends out small parties.

Further south, Gatacre had reached Springfontein on March 16th, and on the 11th Brabant, who was under his orders, had crossed the Orange River at Aliwal North. The duty at first assigned by Lord Roberts to these two forces was to hold the eastern reaches of the Orange River and the adjoining country as far north as Springfontein. At the end of March he told Gatacre to send a post as far north as Dewetsdorp, to guard the road between Maseru and Bloemfontein, if he found he could spare the men. Gatacre had, no doubt, some excuse in the Commander-in-chief's optimism, but even so he interpreted his duty of sending out detachments in an extraordinarily sanguine spirit. On March 18th a patrol of 100 men was sent off to Smithfield, fifty miles from the railway, who all but stumbled into a superior body of Olivier's force; two days later, on Lord Roberts's express directions, a stronger column, consisting of the Royal Irish Rifles and the 77th Battery, were sent

thither, but the battery and all but three companies were recalled in a few days. Subsequently these three companies were relieved at Smithfield by 85 of Brabant's Queenstown Volunteers; they then advanced to Helvetia further north, still distributing proclamations and receiving surrenders. Meanwhile Brabant had sent off 500 men and two guns to Rouxville; 600 rifles were collected here, and 400 at Zastron, and the farmers expressed their pleasure in the auguries of peace; an expedition of colonials, reinforced by some M.I. of Gatacre's, was also sent to Wepener, where, however, the disposition shown was not so friendly.

Appearance of pacification general.

An appearance of permanence was also rapidly given to the British occupation by the establishment of some form of civil government in all districts which had been visited by Lord Roberts's troops. In Bloemfontein itself, on the day after the entry, General Pretyman was appointed Military Governor with general control over the civil administration of the occupied portions of the Free State. Officers of the army, and in some cases the former landdrosts, were appointed to the civil magistracies in outlying towns. In the capital a market was opened, prices were proclaimed, police were organised, a civil postal service inaugurated, and the State Treasury and Customs offices began their duties.

Nevertheless some delay necessary in advancing to Pretoria.

Nothing for the moment seemed to disturb the appearance of profound tranquillity which had settled upon the country south of Bloemfontein; in spite of this, Lord Roberts was soon forced to admit to himself that his further advance would have to be postponed longer than he had expected. He was the first to regret it, as he realised the advantage of a rapid blow while the Boers were still half-dazed by his early victories. But the causes of delay were unavoidable.

Necessity of bringing up stores, etc., by railway.

The chief of these, on which nearly every other hinged, was the inadequate means which Lord Roberts had for communicating with his base. The army which entered Bloemfontein required, before it could advance further with safety, reinforcements, drafts, remounts, a large reserve of supplies, and medical equipment. The country could not be relied on to supply these, and it will be remembered that East London, the nearest port, was 402 miles off,

Port Elizabeth 450, and Cape Town, the chief base, 750; while the railways connecting these ports with Bloemfontein all converged into one single line for the last ninety miles from Springfontein.* Consequently, the three trunk lines were reduced to the capacity of one before they reached Bloemfontein. Moreover, when Lord Roberts entered Bloemfontein, traffic with the south was entirely suspended, owing to the destruction of the Bethulie and Norval's Pont bridges by the Boers. The rolling-stock was also deficient, for the army had to depend almost entirely on that belonging to the Cape Government.†

Repair of railway necessary.

Lieutenant-Colonel Girouard, the director of railways, quickly set to work to bring the lines into working order. Hitherto the railways in use in Cape Colony and Natal had been administered by the civilian staffs in more or less close co-operation with the military; but, as it was evident that in the future many miles of railway in the Orange Free State and Transvaal would be captured and require to be provided with a new staff, it was considered advisable to organise a separate technical railway staff for this purpose, and to create a separate railway system commencing at the Orange River. The members of this railway staff were partly civilians and partly soldiers; in fact, the need of trained railway men was so great that any one with the slightest knowledge of railway working was appointed to this staff, the management of which was under the direct control of Lieutenant-Colonel Girouard. This new system was called the Imperial Military Railway. The work of making low level deviations at Bethulie and Norval's Pont was begun as soon as the English columns reached the Orange River; and until these were ready, goods were brought over partly by an aerial tramway erected at Norval's Pont, partly by the use of the road bridge at Bethulie. The deviations over the Orange

* The carrying capacity of the Cape Town branch was still further diminished by its also having to feed the Kimberley line.

† It is true nearly 400 trucks and carriages and 26 engines were captured in Bloemfontein, but half the latter were damaged, and the Cape Government had started the war with a shortage, due to the amount of rolling-stock left in the Transvaal and Free State.

River were ready, at Norval's Pont by 27th March, and at Bethulie by the end of April. The glut of traffic on the single line between Springfontein and Bloemfontein was to some extent relieved by making sidings for 300 trucks at the two places, and arrangements were made to have halting places with supplies for men and horses at regular intervals between Springfontein and Bloemfontein, so that troops and remounts could be detrained at the former place, leaving the railway free for supplies. The work of the railway.

A large margin of supplies before a further advance could be made was an obvious necessity in an enemy's country which at any time was but poorly stocked with necessaries. Thirty-four thousand men entered Bloemfontein, and for these there was only five days' supply of breadstuffs and biscuit in hand; for the 11,500 horses there was hardly any forage. Colonel Richardson, the chief supply officer, by prompt action secured twenty-seven more days' supplies in Bloemfontein, but the force was constantly increasing, and the forage and grazing were always defective. As soon as Ladysmith was relieved, Lord Roberts sent for Colonel Ward, who had been Sir George White's supply officer, to act in a similar capacity on the headquarters staff, while Colonel Richardson returned to Cape Town to direct the organisation at the base. Under their combined efforts a state of things which at one time seemed critical was gradually remedied. In South Africa, generally, there was never any dearth of supplies, which were poured in lavishly from home;* but the difficulty of stocking Bloemfontein may be imagined from the fact that two trains of twenty-four trucks each were required to supply the force with food for one day, and that the daily total number of such trains for all purposes was only seven and a half. Between March 29, when through traffic was opened, and April 7, Lord Roberts was only able to obtain 286 truck loads. After that date precedence was given on the railway to supplies, i. Supplies.

* On March 15 there were in South Africa four months' reserves of breadstuffs, two of tinned meat, three of groceries, and 3½ of forage, for 210,000 men and 95,000 horses, and these totals went on gradually increasing.

and by the end of the month the reserve fixed upon by Lord Roberts of thirty days' supplies for 100,000 men had been accumulated.

ii. Hospital stores.

A circumstance which very soon interfered with the regular carriage of supplies, and which added to Lord Roberts's difficulties, was the serious outbreak of enteric fever shortly after the occupation, fostered largely by the unhealthy conditions and the exertions of the troops at Paardeberg. Within ten days there were over 1,000 in hospital, three weeks later this number was more than doubled, and when Lord Roberts started north he had to leave 4,500 sick behind.* At first the means for coping with the disease were very defective, and the consequent suffering great. Owing to the necessity of cutting down transport to a *minimum* on the march from Ramdam, the number and equipment of field hospitals accompanying the force had been considerably reduced; and as there was nothing ready in Bloemfontein, and no trains came through till the end of March, the best arrangements possible under the circumstances had to be improvised. Buildings like the Raadzaal and the large schools were turned into hospitals, but the equipment was defective and the dearth of doctors and nurses was severely felt. The virulence of the epidemic was undoubtedly increased by the absence of tents at first or of any attempt to quarter the soldiers on the inhabitants of Bloemfontein. To this was added the loss of the water supply from Sannah's Post during April and the consequent necessity of relying on the often tainted wells in Bloemfontein. Further, the medical officers might have followed the example of the supply officers and shown more promptitude in commandeering whatever they needed in the town, and there seems to have been some delay in realising the urgency for a large increase of staff; but on the other hand, as far as the bare

* These numbers, large as they are, give only a partial idea of the amount of sickness suffered by the army at this time, for all patients well enough to be removed from Bloemfontein were taken to hospitals in Cape Colony as soon as the conditions of traffic on the railway allowed it. Thus on May 4 the total number of patients in all the hospitals in South Africa was 15,000, which, out of a force of 200,000, makes the high proportion of 75 per 1,000.

necessities of supplying food to the troops would allow it, both the medical and military authorities showed zeal in bringing up hospitals and medical necessaries as soon as the line was open. In a month's time accommodation for 1,960 patients was brought up, besides enough truck loads of medical comforts to alleviate the distress and suffering very considerably.

iii. Reinforcements

Another tax on the railway was the large number of reinforcements which had to be brought up in men, horses, and guns. The wastage during the march to Bloemfontein due to casualties in the field, sickness, and exhaustion had been considerable, and the outbreak of enteric fever in Bloemfontein still further reduced the number of men fit for service. At the end of March, for example, the Seventh Division had 3,000 on the non-effective list out of 9,000, and the Sixth Division was reduced to 5,265, having lost 1,600 in a month. Similarly, the horses in French's cavalry division had fallen out at an alarming rate; on arriving at Paardeberg they had been reduced by one-third of their original numbers, and at Bloemfontein by two-thirds; indeed, in the week between Poplar Grove and Bloemfontein no less than 650 had been killed, wounded, or died of exhaustion. The transport animals had also suffered, for between the Modder River and Bloemfontein the mules had been reduced from 11,362 to 10,566 and the oxen from 9,788 to 8,968, and the loss would have been much greater if it had not been for the captures of stock made on the road. Not only had these losses to be made good, but the army in the Free State had to be doubled before an advance could be made.

By this time the results of the War Office's energetic action in December were being fully felt, and reinforcements were pouring into South Africa at the rate of about 30,000 a month. Twelve Militia battalions had arrived by March 13, by the end of April eighteen more had come, and by that time sixty-eight companies of Yeomanry had landed. The sixty Volunteer service companies were nearly all in the country; the 1st Royal Sussex and the 1st Cameron Highlanders had arrived, also 850 more Mounted Infantry

from Australia. During April a new (4th) Cavalry Brigade under General Dickson reinforced General French's division, and the greater part of the Eighth Infantry Division under General Rundle was already at the front. At the same time drafts for the units already in the field were being kept up at the rate of from 6,000 to 8,000 a month; so that altogether by the end of April there were about 210,000 English troops in South Africa. The result of these arrangements was that when Lord Roberts was ready to start, instead of 34,000 men and 113 guns, there were over 70,000 with 178 guns north of the Orange River; nineteen Militia battalions had been distributed along the lines of communication in Cape Colony, Methuen had been reinforced by another brigade and eleven companies of Yeomanry, and Hunter's whole division, with the Imperial Light Horse, had been brought over from Natal to the Western border.

iv. Remounts.

The demand for remounts was also being promptly attended to by the War Office. Before Lord Roberts reached Bloemfontein Lord Lansdowne telegraphed that arrangements had been made to send him 13,000 horses; six weeks later 13,000 more were on the high seas; purchases were also made all over South Africa, especially in Basutoland.* During the months of March and April alone 18,000 horses and cobs and 11,260 mules were landed or bought locally by the Remount Department. But unfortunately the management of the depôts and of the Remount Department generally in South Africa was not efficient. Neither Lord Roberts nor his Chief of the Staff appeared to realise the necessity for organising a department upon which the mobility of the troops so much depended. The officers who were sent to do duty at the depôts were generally selected, not for their knowledge of horsemastership or experience of the duties which would devolve upon them, but because they had failed in the field, or because no places could be found for them at the

* It is an instance of how the prestige of victory affected the natives, that whereas before the occupation of Bloemfontein no purchases could be made in Basutoland, after that 2,000 ponies were purchased in three weeks. The siege of Wepener again gave pause to the Basutos, but after the relief the supply flowed in once more.

front.* There was no directing head,† no system of inspection, no uniformity of management. Thus the Remount Department presented an unfavourable contrast with other branches of the army, and wholly deserved the charges of lack of foresight and inefficiency which were subsequently brought against the central administration at the War Office. Moreover, Lord Roberts's demand for horses was so urgent that they had to be sent up before they had become acclimatised to the country; they could not always be adequately fed and watered during the train journey, and the experiment which was tried of driving them up in mobs from the Orange River did not improve their condition. Even if they could have had a rest on arriving at Bloemfontein it would have saved them, as the horses issued at this time were of a very good stamp; but it happened that there was always some little expedition on hand for the cavalry, so that there was never time to get them into condition. In all, between March 28th and May 4th, the Remount Department in Bloemfontein alone issued 4,500 cavalry horses and cobs and 3,000 mules.

v. More guns.

Besides reinforcements in men and horses, guns had to be provided. In addition to the batteries which came out to complete the new division, siege guns and heavy howitzers were brought up to destroy Boer trenches and to knock down the famous fortifications of Pretoria. The most important of these were the two great 9·45 Skoda howitzers made in Austria, which were landed at Cape Town on May 3rd and hurried up to the front to be ready if necessary for a siege of Pretoria. The English had also learned from the Boers the utility of pom-poms, and, besides the four already at the front, twelve more were brought up to Bloemfontein before the end of April, six were sent to the Western Transvaal, two to lines of communication, and four to Natal.

* "It is well known that during the past campaign all officers preferred employment at the front to work in the Remount Department; and, therefore, the best officers who might have been available for remount work were not under the circumstances obtainable."—Notes on Remount Operations. By Colonel Deane, C.B. (late Director of the Army Remount Department in India). Appendix E., vol. ii., Royal Commission on War in South Africa.

† "I was also struck by the apparent absence of any controlling remount authority in South Africa."—*Ibid.*

vi. Other needs.

But the carriage of reinforcements, remounts, food supplies, hospital stores, and guns did not exhaust the work which the railway was called upon to perform. Some of the troops were already in rags and had to be refitted, warm clothing had to be brought up in view of the approach of winter, railway material had to be conveyed in readiness to repair the line as the army advanced, and even water trains had to be improvised when the Boer occupation of the water-works had sensibly diminished the water supply. Altogether, 9,298 truck loads of various kinds had to be sent up to Springfontein and Bloemfontein between March 29th and May 3rd.*

By end of March preparations nearing completion.

There seemed, however, no necessity to wait for all stores and reinforcements to arrive in Bloemfontein before making any forward movement. By the end of March, therefore, when trains had begun running through to Bloemfontein by Norval's Pont, and everything seemed well in train, Lord Roberts felt so confident of making an early start towards Pretoria, that he ordered a preliminary advance against the Boers in his immediate vicinity north of Bloemfontein.

II

Expedition to Karee Siding the first step.

Thirteen miles north of Bloemfontein the railway crosses the Modder river at Glen Siding, and thence for seven miles, to Karee Siding, passes through the hilly country which forms part of an irregular ridge stretching down in a south-easterly direction towards Thaba 'Nchu. Fourteen miles north of Karee Siding lies Brandfort, then De la Rey's headquarters. During March the Boers kept a hold on these hills as an excellent point of vantage for menacing the railway and also for keeping up communication between Brandfort and Olivier's rallying ground in the difficult country between Ladybrand and Thaba 'Nchu. Already, on the night of March 18th, just before a battalion of the Guards was sent up to the

* These truck loads were made up as follows:—3,684 supplies, 861 ordnance, 1,138 horses, 842 troops, 118 hospital and medical, 487 military wagons, 445 coal for railway, 100 ammunition, 45 railway and telegraph material, 351 baggage, 841 live stock, 87 general, 140 various, 159 ambulance coaches—total 9,298.

Glen, the Boers had blown up the bridge over the Modder, and a few days later they had badly handled four Guards' officers scouting light-heartedly in the same neighbourhood. Lord Roberts therefore had strong reasons for dislodging them from this position, and was also anxious to secure Karee Siding as an advanced base for supplies beyond Bloemfontein.

Troops massed at Glen by March 28.

By the 28th March a considerable body of troops had been concentrated at the Glen. The next to arrive after the Guards were the 9th and 16th Lancers on the 24th March, and on the following day a squadron from each of these regiments made a reconnaissance into Brandfort. On the 27th and 28th, Tucker's Seventh Division with three batteries and Le Gallais's M.I. brigade came up; and on the evening of the latter day the 12th Lancers, Porter's Cavalry Brigade, and Colonel Davidson's R.H.A. division completed the force. Their strength was not so great as would appear from the units enumerated, for the two cavalry brigades together were not much more than the strength of cavalry regiments, and the three R.H.A. batteries could only horse four guns each; the infantry division was slightly better off, as it had 6,000 men, but even so was 3,000 short; the mounted infantry brigade numbered about 1,000. Altogether, the British force engaged was about 9,000 strong, with 30 guns and two pom-poms.* French himself, who had returned to Bloemfontein on the 26th March, leaving Broadwood in charge of the expeditionary force at Thaba 'Nchu, was sent up to take command of the cavalry, while Tucker was in command of his own division and of the mounted infantry. Unfortunately no clear directions had been given by Lord Roberts as to which of these generals was to be in supreme command for conducting the operations.

Boer dispositions at Karee Siding.

De la Rey had temporarily handed over the command at Karee to his subordinate general, Tobias Smuts, whose forces amounted to 3,500 men, including Theron's scouts, a detachment of the Johannesburg police, and the Utrecht and Wakkerstroom commandos, Pretorius's battery, and three pom-

* The battalion of Guards is not included in this total, as they were left at the Glen, and took no part in the action of the 29th.

poms. The main Boer position was on the east of the railway, where three parallel lines of hills running roughly east and west gave them the advantage of successive lines; they also held on the west of the railway a plateau called Houtenbeck, on which rose the eminence of Tafelkop. Behind them a broad, level plain, devoid of cover, stretched to Brandfort.

British plan of attack.

French and Tucker only arrived at Glen on the evening of the 28th, and though the advance was fixed for the next day, neither of them seems to have known that there were any Boers actually at Karee Siding. No scouting had been attempted beyond the reconnaissance of the 25th by the Lancers, who had gone too far round to the west on their way to Brandfort to discover the nature of the position at Karee. Consequently, the two generals had to make their plans somewhat in the dark. Nor was any attempt at concealment made in case there were any Boers on the look-out, as on the 28th Chermside's brigade had crossed the Modder and bivouacked well in view of the Karee heights. The plan determined on was that the infantry division should advance straight up the railway, after the cavalry and mounted infantry had made wide turning movements on the west and east respectively and placed themselves astride the railway in position, if necessary, to intercept the Boer retreat.

Karee Siding engagement, March 29.

By 10 o'clock on the 29th French was able to inform Tucker that he was level with the Boer right flank, and Le Gallais reported that his turning movement was so far unopposed. Tucker then ordered the infantry to advance in échelon of brigades, with Chermside leading on the right.

The infantry attack.

An hour and a half's march brought the infantry to the first parallel which had already been evacuated by the Boers, and was occupied by Chermside without opposition. Wavell was then sent across the railway line over the open plain towards Houtenbeck, the artillery remaining behind to cover his advance. As Chermside moved forward to the second parallel of hills, a few shots were fired at the leading battalion, the Lincolns, but this range also was occupied about 1.30 P.M. without opposition. It was not till an advance was made against the last line that the Boers unmasked their fire. The brushwood with which the ridge was dotted con-

cealed and protected them well, and as two companies of the Scottish Borderers advanced in the open they were suddenly fired on and forced to retire into the shelter of a spruit. At the same time two Boer guns were brought into action from the east, and did some execution among the leading battalions, but were subsequently silenced by two guns brought over exceedingly rough ground on the right of Chermside's line. There was now a considerable gap between the 14th and 15th Brigades, and as it had also become apparent that the Boer strength lay east of the railway, the South Wales Borderers, and later the Cheshires from Wavell's Brigade, were moved up across the open to prolong Chermside's left; as they executed this movement they were a mark for the whole Boer line of fire, but the shooting being execrable, they did not suffer so much as might have been expected.

Then for about an hour the six battalions stood fast, firing in a somewhat random manner at the Boers, who were well protected by bushes and schanzes, and, as their own cover was not so good, suffering more damage than they were able to inflict. Meanwhile Wavell, west of the line, was executing a somewhat similar manœuvre against the minor Boer position on Houtenbeck. Here, too, the extended lines began by advancing well in the open, but had to lie down as they came within the zone of the Boer fire; on this side, however, the English artillery was more effective in clearing the ground for the infantry, and when about 4 o'clock French's shells were also seen bursting upon Houtenbeck, a charge was made with fixed bayonets by the East Lancashires, and the Boers were discovered fleeing across the plain towards Brandfort. They were followed by their comrades east of the railway, but it was some time later before Tucker's artillery came up to the ridge vacated by the Boers, who by that time were too far away to suffer from the few shells aimed at them at long range.

Failure of the turning movements.

According to the original scheme of operations, French and Le Gallais ought to have been co-operating with the frontal attack by taking the Boers in rear, and should by this time have been in position to cut off their retreat and complete the rout; but, except for some heliograph messages,

neither party gave any sign till about 4 o'clock; and when the infantry were on the Boer positions both French and Le Gallais were still away on the flanks.

Le Gallais had chased some parties of Boers from the outlying ridges on the east, but only with the result of sending them to reinforce the main body opposed to Tucker; and in the afternoon he had allowed his whole brigade to be delayed by a small party of Boers on an outlying spur. The consequence was that he never got round. General French's movements after he had arrived at Kalkfontein, on the Boer flank, about 10 o'clock, were unaccountably slow. At this point he was only about eight miles from the railway behind the Boer position. True, his horses were in bad condition and the country between him and the railway was intersected with dongas and wire fencing and covered with brushwood, so that caution in the advance was necessary. Still, even if all these facts be taken into full consideration, the difficulties were hardly sufficient to interfere with the completion of a turning movement which might have turned a mere dislodgment of the Boers into a serious defeat.

Small results of the fight, and their cause.

Altogether, although one immediate object of the operations was attained in securing the Karee line of hills, they cannot be said to have been well managed. The 189 casualties on the English side, compared with the 34 of the Boers, were disproportionate to the results attained in causing inconvenience to the enemy; for, though Lord Roberts secured his advanced base, the Boers continued to hold the outlying ridges which communicated with Thaba 'Nchu. A want of cohesion between the English commanders, due chiefly to a lack of definite instructions from Lord Roberts, an ill-prepared infantry attack, and delay on the part of the cavalry, account for the incompleteness of the victory.

But last obstacle to Roberts's advance seems removed.

Small, however, as this victory was, it seemed to remove the final obstacle to Lord Roberts's speedy advance. The railway was open behind him, supplies and reinforcements were pouring into Bloemfontein, his advanced base was secured, and the country he had traversed seemed on the surface to be perfectly resigned to peace.

CHAPTER II

THE REVIVAL IN THE FREE STATE

I

Apparent demoralisation of the Boers after capture of Bloemfontein.

On the Boer side, immediately after the occupation of Bloemfontein, everything seemed to confirm Lord Roberts's belief in the end of all serious opposition from the Free State forces. In the south, as we have seen, the burghers were readily laying down their arms wherever any small band of English troops appeared to receive them. Even north of Bloemfontein the state of disorganisation seemed highly unpromising for any concerted action in the future by those who still nominally remained in the field. Commandos wandered up and down the line between Brandfort and Kroonstad without any guidance from their leaders as to where they should go, and many of the Free State burghers went away for a holiday on their farms. In Kroonstad itself, the new seat of government, there was the utmost confusion, burghers wanting to go home, foreign adventurers putting forward different plans for the reorganisation of their own corps and everybody else's, and a considerable amount of jealousy existing between the Transvaal and Free State staffs in such matters as commissariat arrangements. And that there was a good deal of reason for discouragement cannot be gainsaid—the relief of Kimberley, Paardeberg, the capture of Bloemfontein, the relief of Ladysmith, following so close on one another, were blows which might well have shaken the courage of the most stout-hearted nation, and the Boers, though one could not call them faint-hearted, were in the mass too fatalistic to be capable of a vigorous fight unaided against adversity.

"*Alles zal recht kom*" ("It will all be right in the end"), in the mouth of a vigorous fighter, is the expression of the most dogged determination; on the other hand, it may be, as it was with many of the Boers, merely the excuse for treating defeat as a reason for inaction. Indeed, they had the fault of most irregular troops of being easily depressed or elated.

Their need for new leaders.

Without good leaders a people like this is useless in a serious war; but the Boers had good leaders ready. So far the conduct of affairs in both States had been left chiefly in the hands of the older men, men who had won their laurels and the gratitude of their countrymen in wars against the native tribes, in the war of twenty years ago against their present enemy, or even as *voortrekkers* in their childhood; in many cases political influence had also, no doubt, counted towards their appointment. Such were Kruger himself, Joubert, Cronje, Marthinus Prinsloo, formerly a great leader against the Basutos, and Lukas Meyer, the former President of the New Republic. Many of these men fought still in the ancestral ways, more as cautious hunters than as soldiers, and with little conception of the discipline and organisation necessary for coping with well-disciplined and highly-organised troops under a leader with a definite plan of campaign. But there were younger men among the Boers who had long chafed under leaders whom they respected indeed for their patriotism and their former achievements, but whose excessive caution seemed to them to degenerate into slowness, and whose political principles they disliked; these younger men wished to see more definite plans, better discipline and organisation, and a bolder method of fighting adopted. Such men were Louis Botha, the one general among the Boers who was a real strategist as well as a good tactician, and who had already abundantly proved his mettle; Christiaan de Wet, who was the best at seizing a momentary opportunity, but just missed being a great general; Ben Viljoen, a swashbuckling talker, but no mean leader for all his swagger; and De la Rey, who, though one of the older men, had always been a progressive, and was the boldest fighter among them. To these leaders in

Old leaders give place to younger men.

the field the Free State could also contribute two remarkable political leaders, President Steyn, one of the greatest heroes of the war on the Boer side, whose unswerving belief in his country's cause and whose dogged perseverance in counsel and in energetic administration stood by him to the end, and Judge Hertzog, later to become a famous guerilla leader, but as yet chiefly occupied with matters of organisation.

Death of Joubert, March 27.

Very shortly after the occupation of Bloemfontein and the apparent fulfilment of his own gloomy forebodings as to the issue of the war, Piet Joubert made way finally for a younger man. Immediately after the first council of war in Kroonstad, he had been taken ill and was forced to retire to his farm. Here on March 27th he died. Since his failure to beat Kruger in the presidential election of 1893, Joubert's influence as a politician had sensibly waned. He was no political leader, and though a man of sound views, he had not the stamina to stand up against Kruger. His position as Commandant-General, though second in importance in the republic, had been secured for him by Kruger merely to disarm the progressive party, of which Joubert was a leader. When this war began he was sixty-five, and even as a commander in the field he did not show the dash and the initiative which were so essential to the Boers in the first stages of the struggle. Most of the successes against Buller had been achieved by younger men acting independently of him. Nevertheless, his loss was genuinely felt, for the Boers are a faithful people with a respect for age and past services, and some of the older men thought his caution and wariness were especially needful at so black a period of their history. At his death, the mourning was general throughout the Transvaal. The State funeral which was accorded him was a sign of the genuine regret of his countrymen, to which Kruger gave fitting expression in a speech marked by several touching passages:

"He died," said his old rival, "as he has lived, on the path of duty and honour . . . humbly and modestly taking his share of privations and the rough work of the campaign like the poorest burgher, a true general, a true Christian, an example to his people."

His opponents also testified to their admiration for qualities aptly summed up by Lord Roberts in his letter of condolence to President Kruger in the phrase: "His personal gallantry was only surpassed by his humane conduct and chivalrous bearing under all circumstances," and by Rudyard Kipling in the first four lines of the sonnet written on the occasion of his death:

> "With those that bred, with those that loosed the strife
> He had no part, whose hands were clear of gain;
> But subtle, strong and stubborn, gave his life
> To a lost cause, and knew the gift was vain."

By Joubert's own wish when he relinquished his command, Louis Botha was appointed his successor, at first with the title of Acting Commandant-General.

Boer councils of war held, and reforms adopted.

The influence of the younger men soon became noticeable in the frequent councils of war which were held immediately before and after the occupation of Bloemfontein. To begin with, de Wet insisted on allowing all his commandos to go home for a fortnight's leave. He showed his wisdom in thus making a virtue of necessity, as most of them would have gone with or without leave, and by regularising it he could count on collecting them together again at the same time. At the first council in Kroonstad, on March 17, which was presided over by Steyn, and attended by President Kruger, Joubert,* De la Rey, Philip Botha, Froneman, A. P. Cronje, and de Wet, two important questions of discipline were brought up. The first had reference to the immense convoys of wagons, often containing the wives and children and household goods of the burghers, which followed every force; these wagons were naturally a source of great weakness to the column which had to protect them, a weakness which was forcibly brought home to them by Cronje's catastrophe. It was accordingly resolved that these wagon camps should no longer be allowed, and that the amount of transport with a column should be strictly limited by commandants. Of course, such an edict did not for a long time, or, indeed,

* By an error on p. 548 of vol. iii., it is stated that the Krygsraad at Glencoe, on March 5, was the last which Joubert attended.

ever, receive implicit obedience; but, as will be seen later, it considerably strengthened the hand of a leader like de Wet, who was determined to enforce it. The second resolution was directed to restraining the Boer's propensity to go off home for a few days from his commando on a complacent doctor's certificate of ill-health, or, failing that, without any excuse or leave at all. There again it was impossible to eradicate the Boer's inveterate domesticity by decree, but the proclamations issued by President Steyn, in accordance with the resolutions of this Council, to regulate sick leave and to provide for proper military courts to take cognizance of military offences, gave strong disciplinarians like de Wet legal authority for the strict rules they imposed.

Nor was the improvement in system confined to resolutions. Within ten days, by the exertions of Steyn, Hertzog, Brebner, and Poultney, a complete reorganisation was made of the system of issuing clothing, transport was found, and the Free State Artillery, which had lost its commander, Major Albrecht, at Paardeberg, was put on a new footing under the supreme command of Judge Hertzog. The foreign volunteers, who had previously not been welcomed with any particular enthusiasm, were made, especially by Steyn, to feel that their services would be of value.* In particular, Colonel de Villebois Mareuil, an adventurous French soldier who had for some time been pressing schemes for the more efficient conduct of the war on the Boer authorities, was given the title of *Vechtgeneraal*, appointed to the command of all the foreign corps, and allowed to conduct an expedition on a plan of his own to surprise Boshof.

Foreign volunteers encouraged.

Besides these reforms of an administrative order, the two Presidents encouraged their burghers to continue the contest by stirring addresses, in which they attempted to communicate some of their own enthusiasm to their more stolid or faint-hearted compatriots. Kruger, before leaving for the

Stirring speeches to the burghers.

* Several foreign artillery officers, who were especially needed, such as Von Lossberg, a German-American, Boldingh, a brave young Dutch artillery officer, and Keulemans, another Dutchman, were about this time given positions of trust in the Free State Artillery.

Transvaal, addressed the men at Kroonstad, and Steyn, besides making speeches there also, travelled down the line and spoke inspiriting words to the forces at Smaldeel and Zand River.

Hopes from the deputation to Europe.

Moreover, for many months to come, great confidence was felt by the leaders in the results of the mission consisting of Messrs. Wessels, Wolmarans, and Fischer, which had been sent to Europe immediately before the capture of Bloemfontein. This confidence was also zealously imparted by them to the rank and file in bulletins and telegrams about the mission's movements, and for long a pathetic hope that some of the Powers might thereby be induced to intervene in the struggle on behalf of the Boers encouraged many of the faint-hearted to continue their exertions.

The Boers regain confidence by end of March.

Already by March 28, when the last council was held before active operations were resumed, there was much in the Boer position which made things look less desperate for them than when they fled in disorderly rout from Bloemfontein. They had already lost about 10,000 men, but with the considerable forces still remaining they might at least delay the English advance till the long-hoped-for and still-expected intervention came from Europe.

Their dispositions.

On the Biggarsberg there were about 8,000 men, quite enough to make Buller's advance on the Transvaal a difficult business; while the Harrismith, Vrede, Kroonstad, and Heilbron commandos, under Prinsloo, still barred the entrance by Van Reenen's Pass into the Orange Free State. Grobler and Olivier after leading the Colesberg and Stormberg commandos of over 5,000 men, with their huge convoy twenty-four miles long, through a country which Roberts thought so secure as to be efficiently guarded by isolated handfuls of English troops, had reached the Ladybrand district, where they could protect the granary of South Africa. Mafeking was still besieged by 2,000 men. Andries P. J. Cronje had 1,500 men at Fourteen Streams; De la Rey had about 3,000 men covering Brandfort; while de Wet on the main line could muster between 3,000 and 4,000 men from the commandos of Bloemfontein, Ladybrand, Wepener, Ficksburg, Bethlehem, and Winburg. The men had mostly had

a rest, many on their own farms; provisions were plentiful, and, as long as the Transvaal was open, all other kinds of supplies also. The British lines had been penetrated by scouts, and the exhausted condition of Lord Roberts's force, his lack of horses, and the slender thread on which his supplies depended, had been discovered. The line had been cut above Bloemfontein in several places so as to make Lord Roberts's advance more precarious, and the chief cause of regret was that it had been done too soon, as the bridges at Vet River and Brandfort might have been utilised by the Boers during six weeks longer for their own supply trains.

Still want of definite plan among them.

Unfortunately for the Boers, even now, in spite of the more vigorous direction of affairs, no very decided plan of campaign seems to have been adopted. Their most effective strategy would probably have been to interpose only the barest screen to Lord Roberts's imminent advance, enough, indeed, to retain the main British Army on the railway line, and then, while amusing Roberts with this feint, to gather their chief strength on his flanks and rear so as to cut the lines of communication, and either starve him out or compel him to return in force and begin all over again. Such a policy might have been suggested to them by Lord Roberts's present difficulties in getting up supplies and remounts even over the comparatively short stretch of line to Bloemfontein. But the policy adopted while Lord Roberts was still at Bloemfontein was a sort of compromise; De la Rey being left at Brandfort with a fairly large force, while de Wet persuaded the Council to let him take off another force to operate with on his own account.

II

De Wet starts from Brandfort, March 28.

At dusk on the evening of March 28 Christiaan de Wet left Brandfort with a column of 1,600 men drawn from the Bloemfontein, Ladybrand, Winburg and Kroonstad commandos; seven guns, including a pom-pom and a maxim, accompanied them. Under de Wet were his brother Piet, and Generals A. P. Cronje, J. B. Wessels and C. C. Froneman. He would answer no inquiries about his

destination, and in order to put even his own men off the scent, he started off in a north-easterly direction, as if towards Winburg. Soon, however, he turned south, and arrived on the morning of the 29th at a farm on the Os Spruit, thirteen miles east of Karee Siding. General Froneman and Commandant Fourie were thence sent southwards to reconnoitre the road between Bloemfontein and Thaba 'Nchu, and in the evening the whole column also moved further south to a farm only seventeen miles north of the British post at the waterworks. Here de Wet gave an indication of the stern discipline which he meant to exercise over his men. Vilonel, the commandant of the Winburg detachment, mutinously refused to obey the recent order limiting the amount of transport to be taken on commando; and, on his persisting, he was reduced to the ranks and superseded by his field-cornet. In the course of the day Froneman and Fourie returned with the report that the garrison at the waterworks was only two hundred strong; and from other sources de Wet learned that Olivier had safely laagered his convoy at Clocolan and, after hunting Pilcher out of Ladybrand, was moving down to attack Broadwood at Thaba 'Nchu.

De Wet's original plan to secure the waterworks at Sannah's Post. His dispositions, March 30.

De Wet at once determined to dash in and secure the waterworks, on which Bloemfontein largely depended for its water supply, and, at the same time, to place himself across Broadwood's line of retreat from Thaba 'Nchu. Hastily summoning a council of war, he disclosed his plan and gave orders for the night march. The force was divided into two parts. Christiaan de Wet himself took command of the smaller detachment of four hundred men from the Bloemfontein and Kroonstad commandos under Fourie and Nel; they were to march to the west of the waterworks. The remaining twelve hundred with the guns under Piet de Wet were to march to the east of the Modder. Speed was imperative in order to be certain of the waterworks before the garrison could be reinforced from Bloemfontein, or by Broadwood falling back before Olivier.

The two columns marched cheerfully through the night of the 30th. They had confidence in their leader; and the

General Christiaan de Wet.

Photo by the Fane Studios, Bloemfontein.

fortnight's rest, which de Wet had wisely allowed them, had given them fresh spirit for the struggle. About midnight despatch riders from the east, who had been given *rendezvous* on the intended line of advance, gave the general the latest information from Thaba 'Nchu. They reported that Broadwood * was still holding on there, but that at two that afternoon he had despatched a convoy along the Bloemfontein road. No news could have been better. De Wet had anticipated only the destruction of the Bloemfontein water supply and the incidental capture of the two hundred mounted infantrymen entrusted with its defence; now it appeared that a large convoy would probably be added to the spoil.

News that Broadwood's convoy has arrived at the waterworks.

By four o'clock on the morning of the 31st the two parts of de Wet's force were in position on each side of the waterworks. These lie on the left or western bank of the Modder River, just south of the drift, where the road crosses from Thaba 'Nchu, eighteen miles to the east. Rising slightly from the Modder the road passes west for two and a quarter miles over what appears to be a level plain up to a gentle slope on which stands Pretorius's farmhouse. Just before reaching the farm, however, it suddenly plunges down some fifteen feet into the bed of the Koornspruit, which is so well concealed that from a slight distance to the east there appears to be no break in the continuity of the plain. From Pretorius's Farm the road goes, always in a westerly direction, over slightly undulating veld for six miles to Boesman's Kop, a solitary eminence which is a marked feature of the landscape between Thaba 'Nchu and Bloemfontein. Thence the distance to Springfield is six miles, and to Bloemfontein fourteen.

On March 31 de Wet's two detachments placed on each side of the waterworks.

The tract of country between the Modder and the Koornspruit may be likened roughly to an oblong, of which the northern and eastern sides are formed by a bend in the Modder, the western by the Koornspruit which falls into the Modder near Waterval Drift, and the southern by the road

The country between the Koornspruit and the Modder described.

* French had left Thaba 'Nchu on the 26th March to resume command of the main force of cavalry, leaving Broadwood in command of the column which had left Bloemfontein on March 18th (see ch. i., p. 9).

between the Koornspruit and Modder Drifts. From north to south the oblong measures about four miles, from east to west about two and a quarter. Six hundred yards south of the Koornspruit Drift there were the piers for a bridge over the spruit, and the embankment of the projected railway to Modderpoort was carried on to the unfinished station buildings of Sannah's Post about a quarter of the way from the spruit to the waterworks. Christiaan de Wet distributed his four hundred men in the bed of the Koornspruit north and south of the drift, and in the kraals and buildings of Pretorius's Farm. Piet de Wet with the guns and the rest of the force was sent to some rising ground north and east of the Modder, whence he could command almost the whole extent of the oblong, as well as the road from Thaba 'Nchu.

De Wet's tactics at Sannah's Post.

De Wet's dispositions resembled those for a deer-drive. Piet de Wet and his men on the slopes beyond the Modder were the beaters, whose task was by gun and rifle fire to drive the English at the waterworks along the only line of retreat to Bloemfontein, across the Koornspruit Drift. Here Christiaan de Wet's riflemen were ready to receive them. No better place for an ambush could have been conceived. Perfectly concealed themselves, the Boers in the kraals on Pretorius's Farm would be able to see any troops bivouacked at the waterworks, while those lining the banks of the spruit could observe every movement along the road to the drift. Thus their fire could be reserved until its effect would be most fatal, since there was no cover for troops that had once passed the station buildings; these, which consisted of two iron sheds and an unfinished brick house, would serve rather as a mark for fire than for protection. The capture of the small garrison and Broadwood's convoy, if it had already reached the Modder, seemed to de Wet a certainty, for even if Broadwood himself came from Thaba 'Nchu, Piet de Wet was in sufficient force to hold him back until Olivier should come up, while on the Bloemfontein side the nearest British force, except for a handful of men at Boesman's Kop, was twelve miles off at Springfield.

But de Wet had miscalculated. An hour before dawn

the Boers in the spruit discovered near Pretorius's Farm a wagon and some Cape carts containing English-speaking refugees. Seized and interrogated, these people revealed the surprising intelligence that they had come from Thaba 'Nchu only just ahead of Broadwood, who with his whole force was already across the Modder. The sight which appeared to de Wet as he peered across towards the waterworks, as soon as the approach of dawn gave sufficient light, fully confirmed their story. Instead of merely a small body of mounted men and an unprotected convoy, a large force of cavalry could be seen bivouacking on the west of the Modder. At the first glance it seemed to de Wet that he might be caught in the very trap which he had prepared for his adversaries; for Broadwood had enough troops to send a sufficient number to take him in rear, while engaging him in front with his main force. Nevertheless, de Wet, trusting to his admirable position and to Broadwood's sense of security, determined to stay where he was and to attempt an even greater stroke than he had anticipated by ambushing the whole of Broadwood's force. He, therefore, waited anxiously for the sound of Piet de Wet's guns.

De Wet surprised by the arrival of Broadwood's whole force.

Broadwood's sudden appearance was due to Olivier, who, emboldened by the ease with which he had driven Pilcher first from Ladybrand and then from Leeuw River Mills, had pushed vigorously forward towards Thaba 'Nchu with about 5,000 men. Thaba 'Nchu is a difficult place to defend, except with a large force, as it lies in a hollow surrounded by a wide circle of hills, the capture of any one of which might have brought disaster to a force in the village; besides, Broadwood had never been intended to fight battles where he was, forty miles from any supporting force, but only to publish Lord Roberts's proclamations and to collect arms from any Boers who might surrender. On finding, therefore, that he was seriously threatened by Olivier's greatly superior force, he determined on the 30th March to withdraw from Thaba 'Nchu, and so informed Lord Roberts. At first he proposed to hold Israel's Poort, six miles away, which had the advantage of being easily defended; but the water supply was inadequate and even

Cause of Broadwood's appearance.

there he would be too far from support; so he finally decided to retire within reach of Bloemfontein, taking with him all stores and any inhabitants of Thaba 'Nchu who wished to remain under British protection.

His retreat from Thaba 'Nchu to Sannah's Post on March 30.

Orders for the march were given out at noon, and by two o'clock the wagons had been loaded up with all the stores they could carry, and moved off escorted by Pilcher's regiment of M.I., and accompanied by a few refugee families. The cavalry, the rest of the M.I. and the guns followed some hours later after a brush with advanced parties of Olivier's commandos as they were leaving Thaba 'Nchu. Late that night Pilcher and the convoy crossed the Modder and laid themselves down by the waterworks; the whole of Broadwood's force had not arrived till about 4.30 A.M. on the morning of the 31st, when Piet de Wet was already in position on the hills to the north-east. Broadwood's total force was about 1,800,* Christiaan and Piet de Wet's 1,600, and Olivier with about 5,000 was advancing from Thaba 'Nchu. Although Broadwood had informed Lord Roberts of his retreat, no message had been received from headquarters.

Pilcher, on arrival at the waterworks, placed a few sentries within 200 yards of the bivouac, but neither he nor Broadwood sent any outposts further afield. Amphlett, in command of the garrison, had been holding the position for the last ten days; moreover, on the 30th, he had ridden over to Thaba 'Nchu, and had been especially charged by Broadwood to take precautions against any force advancing from the north. It was, therefore, very naturally assumed by Broadwood that all due precautions had already been taken. Thus, while the Boers were watching and waiting

Inadequate precautions taken against surprise.

* "Q" and "U" Batteries R.H.A. (Majors Phipps Hornby and Taylor).

2nd Cavalry Brigade:
- Composite Regiment Household Cavalry (Col. Neeld).
- 10th Hussars (Col. Fisher).

Alderson's M.I. Brigade:
- 1st Bn. M.I. (Major Amphlett).
- 1 Co. 2nd Bn. M.I. (Captain Brooke).
- 3rd Bn. M.I. (Lt.-Col. Pilcher).
- Rimington's Guides (Major Rimington).
- New Zealand M.R. (Major Robin).
- Burma M.I. (Major Cruickshank).

for dawn, Broadwood's men, worn out by their long day and night, slept peacefully, unsuspicious of danger. Broadwood, no doubt, congratulated himself on having given Olivier the slip, and being safe within the British outposts.

The patrol to Boesman's Kop.

Only one precaution against surprise had been taken. Every evening a patrol was sent by Amphlett across the Koornspruit to Boesman's Kop, where a company of his regiment, under Captain Bainbridge, was stationed; thence it would return to the waterworks by the following morning. On the night of the 30th the patrol had gone out as usual. It had crossed the Koornspruit before the Boers had arrived, and reported all clear at Boesman's Kop by midnight. At three in the morning it started back, but shortly afterwards returned to Bainbridge bringing the owner of a farm situated between the kop and the spruit, who reported a force of Boers to be in the neighbourhood. Captain Bainbridge, fearing that his own small post would be overwhelmed, sent the man under guard to Springfield to ask for reinforcements; but that the waterworks post was threatened seems hardly to have occurred to him, and it was not till 5 o'clock that he sent out another patrol to go across to Amphlett. This patrol found the Boers already in the Koornspruit; a single shot gave them the alarm, but, instead of giving the alarm themselves, they scampered back as quickly as possible to Boesman's Kop. Bainbridge's fears of an attack on the kop were confirmed; no further steps were taken to warn Amphlett; and Amphlett himself seems to have had no misgivings at his own original patrol not returning. He had not sent out any patrols overnight to the north or the east, so there had been nothing to give warning of Piet de Wet's occupation of the hills beyond the Modder. But shortly after Broadwood's arrival on the 31st he sent out two patrols, one towards the arm of the Modder forming the northern side of the oblong area already described, and another, under Lieutenant Salmon, across the river to the hills on the east. At 6 o'clock, just as the sun was rising, those who were astir in Broadwood's camp heard shots from the east, and shortly afterwards Lieutenant Salmon's patrol galloped in reporting that they had been fired on by some Boers. Little attention

was paid to this warning, as occasional skirmishes with outposts had become too customary to cause any apprehension. Twenty minutes later, however, a shell came pitching on the further bank of the Modder. This shell was soon followed by others into the bivouac on the near bank, where the transport was parked. The beaters had begun their work.

March 31. P. de Wet shells Broadwood's bivouac at 6.20 A.M.

Broadwood's transport, which was south of the road, had no need to wait for orders as the first shells fell among them. The Kaffir drivers inspanned their teams with a rapidity hardly credible to those who had seen the deliberate slowness of the transport hirelings on ordinary occasions; and as soon as a team was ready it would dash off without any further delay towards Boesman's Kop. The troops were equally rapid in saddling-up, but more orderly. Broadwood, who knew nothing of Piet de Wet, naturally imagined that Olivier had caught him up and was pressing the pursuit. His first action was to direct the range-finders of the artillery to ascertain if it were possible to engage the Boer guns. They reported that the Boer guns were 7,000 yards away, out of range of the 12-pounders. This may have been the case at first, but Piet de Wet had very soon moved his guns within 4,000 yards of the bivouac, so that they could easily have been engaged by Broadwood's guns. However, by Broadwood's order, the batteries retired out of range, and, with Roberts's Horse detailed as escort, began following up the convoy. No sooner had this order been given than Pilcher came up to report that he had seen a party of three hundred Boers galloping along the hills to the north in the direction of Boesman's Kop. Broadwood knew that this vantage ground was only held by a weak company, and he knew nothing about Lord Roberts's dispositions nearer Bloemfontein, or whether reinforcements were to be sent to him; the danger, therefore, appeared to him considerable that he might find himself between two Boer forces, one to the east of the Modder, the other at Boesman's Kop. Accordingly, he sent an order for one of the batteries and Roberts's Horse to go in advance of the convoy to the rising ground near Pretorius's Farm, whence they would cover the retreat from the Modder, and hold under observation any Boers moving

Broadwood's convoy hurries off towards Koornspruit.

Broadwood's first dispositions.

round towards Boesman's Kop; the 10th Hussars and Household Cavalry, under Colonel Fisher, were sent to follow up the artillery; a company of Alderson's M.I., under Captain Radcliffe, were ordered to occupy a kopje south of, and commanding, Waterval Drift, and the rest of the M.I. were left to hold the line of the Modder as rearguard.

When Broadwood's second order reached Colonel Rochfort, the officer in command of the brigade division of artillery, the disarray in the plain between the Modder and Pretorius's Farm was complete. The transport wagons were trotting westwards in no sort of order; Roberts's Horse, who ought to have been advance guard and escort to the guns, found themselves on the left of the transport, while the guns were on the right. Already some of the transport wagons had arrived at the drift over the Koornspruit, but seemed to be making no progress across it, so that a wedge-shaped block was being gradually formed at that point. Seeing the confusion, Colonel Rochfort sent forward his adjutant, Major Wray, to clear a passage for the guns, and ordered "U" Battery, being nearer the drift, to form battery column, and advance at a trot.

The block at the drift.

So far there had been no warning to the artillery of what awaited them in the spruit. There was one more chance left to save them from destruction. On the preceding day Burnham, a famous scout, who had been sent for specially from Canada by Lord Roberts, had started on a tour of investigation by himself to the east of Bloemfontein. In the early morning of the 31st he had arrived at Pretorius's Farm just as Christiaan de Wet's party were coming up. Managing to conceal himself, he discovered at dawn the trap which had been laid for the English. At first he attempted to cross the spruit and warn Broadwood, but finding it too well guarded, he tried to attract the attention of the advancing troops by standing on the high ground and signalling to them with a red scarf. But he only attracted the attention of the Boers, who seized him before his signal had been noticed.

Last chance of saving the guns lost.

Nothing, then, had interfered with de Wet's plans. As the first Cape carts of the transport came up they were sent across the spruit to disarm suspicion; one or two wagons

The trap.

were allowed to descend into the drift after their Kaffir drivers had been terrorized into silence; as others kept coming up, the Boers quietly came out, made the drivers and any soldiers who happened to be riding go down into the bed of the spruit, and left the wagons to block the way. So far not a shot had been fired, and there had been hardly a sound. De Wet had said that he himself would fire the first shot, nor had a man ventured to forestall him.

"U" Battery captured.

As Wray came up to the spruit he thought the mass of halted wagons was due to nothing more than the usual block at a drift, and he went right into the spruit. Before he had realized the position, Major Taylor with "U" Battery was at his heels. Suddenly armed Boers came quietly from among the wagons and out of the spruit, and began to cluster round Wray and Taylor and the leading teams of the battery. "Dismount, you are prisoners, go to the wagons," were the orders issued by de Wet himself to Taylor and his gunners. Still not a shot was fired. Taylor, profiting by a moment while his captors' attention was diverted, ran quickly along his battery, and after warning his own captain, hurriedly explained the state of affairs in the donga to Major Phipps Hornby, who was close behind with "Q" Battery. Still over all there was an almost unearthly silence, more bewildering than any clash of arms or loud issue of orders. But Hornby, on hearing the news, wheeled about his guns. Almost at the same moment Roberts's Horse, coming up on the left of the convoy, saw what had happened. Reining up just before the spruit, their colonel, Dawson, shouted out the order: "Files about—gallop!"

De Wet opens fire.

Then de Wet opened fire. As "Q" and Roberts's Horse wheeled, a crash of musketry came from the spruit. "Q" galloped madly to the station buildings, followed by Roberts's Horse. A gun and two ammunition wagons were overturned in the flight and their horses killed. When the outburst of firing came the drivers of "U" Battery had dismounted and, by permission of their captors, were quietly unrolling their cloaks; their horses, frightened by the noise, stampeded in all directions. The Boers soon shot down most of the horses to prevent the escape of the guns; one gun,

however, got away and was carried along by its horses to join "Q" Battery.

"Q" Battery escapes and comes into action, 8 A.M.

Before this gun had come up Hornby had already halted at the Sannah's Post buildings, and, unlimbering his guns in front of the station, he sent the limbers and wagons behind it, and by eight o'clock he had begun firing on the spruit. Alderson, on hearing the outburst of rifle fire, immediately sent two of his strongest companies from the Burma M.I. under Captain Cruickshank, to act as escort to the guns; these were soon joined by some of Roberts's Horse.

Broadwood's plan for retrieving the disaster.

Broadwood himself had started from the bivouac in company with the 10th Hussars and Household Cavalry. When Rochfort came back from "Q" Battery to tell him that there were Boers in the spruit, it seemed to him so incredible that he rode on ahead to find out for himself. But the outburst of Mauser fire soon carried conviction, whereupon with the cavalry he also turned towards the station buildings. Here Broadwood, rapidly taking in the position, determined to turn the tables on his ambushers. Leading the cavalry to a point in the Koornspruit a little distance south of the railway embankment, he ordered the Household Cavalry to work up the spruit on to de Wet's flank, and Colonel Fisher with the Hussars to cross to the west of the spruit and, after ascertaining if Boesman's Kop was still held by Bainbridge, to wheel round on to de Wet's rear.

From the north and east of the Modder, Piet de Wet had been co-operating vigorously with his brother by continuing his shell fire and by sending parties of his men to attempt the crossing of the river. But Alderson's dispositions to repel these attacks were excellent. On the north Captain Radcliffe's company were watching Waterval Drift; while Rimington's Guides and the 1st Battalion M.I. were holding a second line nearer the guns, but also facing north. Towards the east the 3rd Battalion M.I. were holding the two drifts immediately to the north of the Waterworks. Alderson kept by himself, south of the road, the rest of Roberts's Horse and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles as a reserve.

Thus far the convoy and six out of twelve guns had been lost, but Broadwood's situation was by no means desperate, for he still had a slightly larger force than both the de Wets' forces together, while there seemed a chance that if the cavalry carried out his intentions and took Christiaan de Wet in rear, the temporary defeat might be turned into a victory. This chance was even greater than Broadwood himself knew, for there were reinforcements at hand of whose existence he was ignorant.

Assistance near at hand from Martyr.

On the evening of the 30th, as soon as Lord Roberts heard that Broadwood was retiring from Thaba 'Nchu before Olivier's superior numbers, he gave orders that he should be supported in his retirement. The nearest force to Thaba 'Nchu of any importance was Martyr's M.I. brigade at Springfield, consisting of the 2nd and 4th Battalions and of the Queensland M.I., about six hundred strong; and a mile on the other side of Bloemfontein was General Colvile's division of infantry. Both Martyr and Colvile were ordered to march independently at daybreak on the 31st to Waterval Drift, where Colvile was to assume command of both forces and judge how he could best support Broadwood. Martyr, who had only six miles to march, was somewhat delayed in starting by having to collect his force, but arrived at Boesman's Kop about the time when Broadwood was directing the cavalry turning movement. At the kop Martyr heard from Bainbridge all that he knew, and from the summit could see the area of the fight lying clear as a map before him; Radcliffe was visible on his kopje near Waterval Drift, and beyond the Koornspruit a fight could be seen proceeding.

Progress of the fight.

When Broadwood returned to the guns after placing his cavalry for the counter-move, he found them keeping up a steady fire against the Boers in the ambush. Unfortunately, this fire was not very effective because, although they were only 800 yards from the edge of the spruit where most of the Boers were, the guns were sighted so as to pitch their shells either into or beyond the bed of the spruit; at the same time they were absolutely exposed while their adversaries were in good cover behind the banks of the donga or among the wagons massed in front of it. Nevertheless their shells and

the bullets of the escort were sufficient to deter the Boers from coming out of their hiding-place. Alderson's men were also holding their own.

Broadwood was now anxiously looking for the expected diversion by the cavalry, and, as it was delayed, he again went back to discover the cause. In the spruit he found the Household Cavalry holding de Wet's right flank, but Fisher and the 10th Hussars a little beyond seemed to have come to a standstill. Broadwood ordered up a company of the Burma M.I. to take the place of the Household Cavalry, whom he sent to join the Hussars, and again explained through Fisher's second-in-command, Major Alexander, the manœuvre he desired him to undertake. He then again returned to the guns. Here Hornby, directing the fire of his battery, seemed to have a charmed life, and his captain, Humphreys, was doing the work of several men, as he came backwards and forwards with the ammunition. But among the men the losses were becoming serious. At first three men were loading, laying and firing a gun, then two, then in some cases only a single man. One gun was being worked by Lieutenant Peck alone. Behind the buildings, which offered no resistance to rifle shots, the wagon and limber numbers and the horses were almost equally exposed. Still the gunners with their escort of M.I. were holding Christiaan de Wet in check. Alderson was also holding the flank and rear.

The cavalry fails Broadwood, so he orders a retreat at 10 A.M.

Again Broadwood watched for signs of the cavalry in the west, but none came. At last, between 9 and 10 o'clock, still knowing nothing of Martyr's arrival, he began to fear that Boesman's Kop had been captured by the Boers and that the cavalry had turned off to dislodge them. He went over to Alderson and found that he was holding his ground well and would be able to maintain it, if there was any chance of relief from the west; but the Boers were now beginning to come in from the north and from the east, and failing help from the cavalry it would be madness to remain until the M.I. had fired their last cartridge. Broadwood, therefore, felt constrained to give the order for a general retirement south-west across the spruit.

The guns taken out of action.

When Broadwood's order came for the guns to be withdrawn, Major Hornby, Captain Humphreys and ten men of the battery alone remained on their feet. The fire from the spruit and the transport was constantly increasing in vigour, and the guns were seventy yards from even the slight cover afforded by the station buildings. Then Hornby and Humphreys set themselves to bring back the guns. Eight gunners responded to their call, and ran back two pieces forty yards. Here these brave men lay down exhausted. Hornby went to the mounted infantry escort and called for volunteers. Lieutenants Stirling, Way, Ainsworth, Grover and Ashburner of the Burma M.I., Captain Maxwell of Roberts's Horse, and about four or five men at once responded. These men gallantly faced the withering fire, and, with two gunners, ran back the first two guns to the shelter of the railway embankment; three yet remained and all the limbers. As the men came out towards them the storm of bullets was so violent that they pressed their helmets down on their heads and bent forward as if they were meeting a heavy wind; the horses that were brought out fared even worse than the men, for team after team was shot down before it could bring away its burden. Yet through it all the men who did the work showed the coolness of a parade. Humphreys, for example, had his stick knocked out of his hand by a bullet; he quietly stooped down, picked it up, and walked on. Hornby himself was asked to take cover by Broadwood's aide-de-camp, and replied, "Perhaps it would be as well, but I have been here for some hours now." At last, after many failures, four guns and limbers altogether were brought in. One gun and limber had to be left in the open for want of horses to bring them away, and finally five guns, including the one remaining of "U," one wagon and one wagon limber were saved. As the mutilated remains of the two batteries of horse artillery trotted to the rear through the line of prone mounted infantrymen, though it was to court death to show a hand, the men, in a spontaneous outburst of admiration, rose to their feet and cheered the gallant survivors.

The guns, under the escort of Roberts's Horse and covered by the rest of the M.I., retired towards a drift over

LIEUT-COLONEL H. DE B. DE LISLE, D.S.O.,
COMMANDING 2ND CORPS, M.I.
Photo by Elliott & Fry.

LIEUT-COLONEL T. D. PILCHER,
COMMANDING 3RD CORPS, M.I.
Photo by Elliott & Fry.

MAJOR E. J. PHIPPS HORNBY, V.C.
COMMANDING Q BATTERY R.H.A.
Photo by C. Vandyk

LIEUT-COLONEL W. C. ROSS,
COMMANDING 8TH CORPS, M.I.
Photo by Lambert Weston.

the Koornspruit, about a mile south of the unfinished railway bridge. Their retirement was the signal for the Boers to come surging forward into the open from north, west and east. Some fired from the saddle as they rode, others dismounted at intervals to fire a shot, all pressed boldly on to reap the full harvest of their victory. The whole brunt of the fighting now fell on the M.I. Radcliffe, on his kopje near the Modder, was cut off from all communication with the main body, but he kept a number of Boers busy; the rest of the M.I. were withdrawn slowly and in good order by Alderson, who displayed coolness and skill in conducting the retreat. By successive companies, Rimington's Guides and the 1st and 3rd M.I. Battalions gradually fell back towards the positions further south, which were being held by Alderson's second line, consisting of the New Zealanders and the Burma M.I. As each company retired behind the next, the Boers advanced in rushes up to within a hundred yards, only to be stopped by the fire of the company that remained to face them. There was no confusion and no undue haste, where all seemed to have a noble emulation to save a comrade or to retrieve the day from utter disaster. Pilcher himself returned to within 300 yards of the Koornspruit, and carried off a huge wounded man on his horse. Major Booth of the 5th (Northumberland) Fusiliers, a most gallant and indeed over-venturesome officer, with two of his subalterns, Hall and Toppin, and two men, stayed a few minutes longer than he should have on a rise south of the road before taking his turn at retreat, as he erroneously thought some men had been left behind. He and one of his men were killed, while the rest were wounded or captured. The last to reach the drift, after the guns and all the rest had already gone safely across, were the New Zealanders. The Boers pursued right up to the drift; then, after a final skirmish with the 3rd M.I., left to hold it, they returned to gather up their spoils.

Orderly retreat of Alderson's M.I.

By a quarter past eleven Broadwood had withdrawn all his force that had escaped capture, except Radcliffe's company, to a dip in the ground two miles east of Boesman's Kop. The disaster had been considerable. Out of a total of 1,800 men, 12 guns and 92 wagons, one third of the men had been

Broadwood in safety at 11.15. His losses.

captured, killed or wounded,* while 7 guns and 83 wagons, loaded up with stores, had fallen into de Wet's hands.

Martyr's ineffectual measures, and failure of the cavalry.

When Broadwood had reached a place of safety he discovered, for the first time, that there had been a brigade of mounted infantry near Boesman's Kop for the last three hours, and the question which he asked himself, and which everybody must ask himself, is, what had this mounted infantry and what had his own cavalry been doing all this time? When Martyr, who reached the top of Boesman's Kop not later than half-past eight, saw the battle going on within seven miles of him, he had a chance such as is rarely given to a soldier. His brigade, it is true, was weak, but it still numbered 600; it is true, also, that he could not tell exactly what was happening, but at least it was obvious that there were Boers between him and another British force. A direct advance with his whole brigade would at least relieve the difficulties of the British force; it might even secure a victory. Indeed, so impressed were the Boers in the Koornspruit with their danger when they first saw Martyr's brigade, that many of them gave themselves up for lost, and quite seriously told their prisoners that they fully expected to be in their position by the evening. But, unfortunately, Martyr, instead of creating a diversion with his whole force, split it up. With the idea of helping Radcliffe, who could be seen holding the kopje near Waterval Drift, and at the same time of carrying out Lord Roberts's instructions, he sent one half of his force, consisting of the 4th M.I. Battalion and the Queenslanders, under Colonel Henry towards the Modder. However, about nine o'clock, shortly after he had despatched them, he received a message from Colonel Fisher, who was near the Koornspruit contemplating the execution of Broadwood's orders, asking for assistance. Thereupon he sent Dobell with three companies of the 2nd M.I. regiment in a south-easterly direction. Martyr's brigade was not large to begin with; by splitting it up he reduced its efficiency out of all proportion. Henry secured Waterval Drift, sent the Queenslanders to Radcliffe's assistance, and the 4th M.I. to work along the right bank of the Modder. Dobell reached Fisher about half-past nine, as he

* The total killed and wounded was 159; the total prisoners, 421.

was preparing to attack de Wet in rear. Fisher explained to him the situation, and asked him to co-operate. Dobell was at first somewhat reluctant to attack without Martyr's explicit orders, but finally agreed to prolong Fisher's line to the left. At last, therefore, about ten o'clock, when Broadwood had already begun to retire, the long-expected turning movement was commenced. But it was not entered upon with spirit, nor was it ever carried through. Fisher and Dobell formed up facing north-east, and sent forward scouts towards the spruit; then Dobell, finding himself exposed to fire, retired about two hundred yards; at once Fisher, thinking he was not to be supported, stopped his own advance. Subsequently Dobell occupied part of the rising ground overlooking the Koornspruit, and it was here that he was found by Broadwood shortly after eleven. Broadwood immediately sent some guns of "Q" Battery to support him, and urged him forward to another attack on the spruit. However, Dobell, after another gingerly advance, reported that the Boers in the spruit had been reinforced to 1,500 men, and thought it wiser not to proceed. In his estimate of the Boer numbers he was mistaken, for they never amounted to more than 600 men, even when Broadwood had retired. The cavalry and Dobell on this occasion evidently did not in the least understand how few Boers there were in the Koornspruit; but they might have made more strenuous efforts to discover.

Colvile appears at 11.15.

By the time that Broadwood had reached safety another actor had appeared upon the scene, for Colvile and his staff were at Boesman's Kop. Colvile's division, consisting of Smith-Dorrien's brigade and three battalions of the Highland Brigade under MacDonald, with Colonel Flint's brigade division of artillery, started from their bivouac on the west of Bloemfontein half an hour before dawn. Before reaching Springfield, a little after ten, they could hear the sound of Broadwood's guns and found there a messenger from Martyr asking for reinforcements. Colvile ordered the guns to trot on ahead of the infantry, and himself rode forward with his staff. He reached the top of Boesman's Kop by a quarter-past eleven; he there heard all that Martyr could tell him, saw Broadwood two miles away, and beyond the Koornspruit the Boers

collecting their spoil. Instead, however, of riding forward himself to ascertain from Broadwood as quickly as possible what had occurred and what he suggested, he sent a staff officer to order him to the top of Boesman's Kop. Broadwood, feeling that this was not the time to leave his own troops, refused to come, but urged that fresh troops should make a direct advance on the Boers.

De Wet secures his booty, and crosses the Modder.

Colvile's infantry had not all reached Boesman's Kop till past noon, and they were then allowed an hour's rest. During the first hour which had elapsed since Broadwood's final withdrawal to the west of the Koornspruit the Boers had been feverishly making preparations to retire beyond the Modder with their booty and prisoners, before they were set upon by the British reinforcements. All the gun teams and a good many convoy animals had been killed in the fight, so that teams for the captured guns and wagons had to be improvised as well as possible out of the survivors. About the time, however, that the infantry arrived at Boesman's Kop, mules had been inspanned into the seven guns, and they were on their way to the waterworks drift. Half an hour later the prisoners, to the number of 421, who had been allowed to take some kit and provisions from the wagons, were taken off in the same direction, and the wagons followed as soon as they could be got ready; Broadwood's wounded were left in a building near the waterworks on the left bank of the Modder. De Wet was fully expecting to be attacked before he could escape, and had brought over one of Piet de Wet's guns to the Koornspruit to help the rearguard he was leaving there. But on crossing the Modder, between twelve and one, he found an unexpected addition to his force in the arrival of Olivier's advance-guard. Piet de Wet, indeed, who had never realized that he had the whole of Broadwood's force before him, at first took Olivier's men for another British force from Thaba 'Nchu, and was preparing to resist them, when he found them to be friends. By half-past one, therefore, not only was the bulk of the convoy, besides the captured guns and prisoners, across the Modder, but de Wet had so strong a force that he could hold the hills east of the Modder as well as the waterworks in strength.

De Wet's haste was hardly necessary. Colvile had very soon decided against the direct advance on the Koornspruit, which MacDonald urged, but preferred to occupy Waterval Drift, where he would be on the Boers' flanks. Accordingly, after the infantry had been sufficiently rested, they marched in a north-easterly direction. Since the morning Henry's Queenslanders had effected a junction with Captain Radcliffe, who was thus enabled to cut his way out from his isolated kopje after holding it for over six hours. He had done useful work at small cost, for he had only lost eight men out of sixty-three, though twenty-seven horses had been shot. The rest of Henry's M.I., after proceeding some way along the right bank of the Modder, had been driven back to Waterval Drift by Piet de Wet's guns, and had subsequently been obliged to abandon the drift. Thus when Colvile's infantry arrived, their first business was to recapture this crossing over the Modder. By five o'clock on the evening of the 31st March, the infantry, helped by the rest of Henry's M.I., had retaken the drift, where they remained for the night; Broadwood, having lost all his stores and ammunition, had returned to Springfield to refit; the Boers had safely sent off their captures towards Winburg, and were holding the hills east and north of the Modder and the waterworks on the western bank.

Colvile goes to Waterval Drift.

Lord Roberts had originally sent Martyr and Colvile to Waterval Drift simply to support Broadwood in case of need; but at ten o'clock on the morning of the 31st he had heard of Broadwood's serious predicament at Sannah's Post. He at once ordered French to take the rest of the cavalry to his support. On the 29th March the cavalry had been engaged in the long and tiring operations at Karee Siding,* and had only returned by the afternoon of the 30th to their bivouacs near Bloemfontein. These were somewhat scattered, the 1st Brigade being at Wessels Farm, four and a half miles west of the town, the 3rd at Rustfontein, two and a half miles to the north, and the 12th Lancers and Davidson's brigade division of artillery at Bloemspruit, five miles to the east. By eleven o'clock on the 31st Lord Roberts's orders

French sent out by Roberts.

* See chap. i., pp. 19–22.

had been sent round, and within two hours the transport had been made ready, the best horses had been picked out, and the cavalry were on the way.

French's uncertainty.

The general confusion and uncertainty as to what had actually happened, and as to what was still happening, is well shown by the fact that when French, with the headquarters of the cavalry, arrived at Springfield about two o'clock, it was reported to him that the Boers were all moving west of the Modder past Boesman's Kop with the idea of attacking Bloemfontein. French accordingly spent the rest of the day in sending out patrols to the south, while Gordon was ordered forward to Boesman's Kop to obtain communication with Colvile.

French's and Colvile's abortive operations on April 1.

On April 1 French, being still uncertain how far west the Boers had come, sent patrols out as far as Krantz Kraal to the north of Boesman's Kop, as well as to the south. By eleven, however, he had reached Waterval Drift with Broadwood's and Gordon's brigades, while Porter was sent due east towards the waterworks. After consultation together, French and Colvile agreed that, even if it were too late to recover any of the guns or other captures, it was worth while attempting to regain possession of the waterworks on which the health of Bloemfontein very largely depended. It was therefore arranged that Colvile, with Smith-Dorrien's brigade, should cross the Koornspruit and attack the waterworks, while the Highland Brigade remained in charge of Waterval Drift and French threatened the Boer right flank on the Modder. Since ten that morning Porter had been holding the ridge west of the Koornspruit, and, as a result of a reconnaissance further east, he told Colvile on his arrival that there were about 1,500 Boers in occupation of the waterworks and of the hills east of the Modder. This information decided Colvile that it would be too costly an undertaking to recover the waterworks, so he withdrew at once to Boesman's Kop. Porter was left in a somewhat precarious position by Colvile's retirement, as his numbers hardly exceeded eighty; but he was determined to rescue Broadwood's wounded. This, with the aid of a battalion which Smith-Dorrien lent him for the purpose, he succeeded in effecting. French began his move-

ment along the Modder, as he had arranged with Colvile, and he found the Boers already exhibiting signs of the nervousness habitual to them when their flank was threatened. But when Colvile retired French saw that his own advance would serve no purpose, so he fell back again on Waterval Drift.

Roberts recalls all troops on April 2.

On April 2 Lord Roberts, who was as unwilling as Colvile to lose life in attempting to recapture the waterworks, recalled all the troops to Bloemfontein except some outposts left at Springfield and Boesman's Kop. Thus the waterworks were left in the Boers' hands, a circumstance which contributed largely to the subsequent very serious epidemic of enteric fever in Bloemfontein.

De Wet's victory, its results, and its causes.

Sannah's Post was the first, and in some ways the most brilliant, of all de Wet's surprises. It was so successful because, to begin with, de Wet had formed a very definite plan for a very definite object, and had taken care that there should not be a hitch in any detail; secondly, when he found that the circumstances had entirely changed by the sudden appearance of Broadwood's whole force, he had the courage and the rapidity of decision requisite to enable him to meet them. His men fought well with good discipline from the first, and with the spirit born of success at the end.

Bad generalship on the British side,

The good leading of de Wet stands in marked contrast to the mistakes made by those in high command on the British side. There was in the first place a want of definiteness in Lord Roberts's object in keeping Broadwood at Thaba 'Nchu at all. If he was meant to terrorize Olivier and the Boers to the east by a sudden raid, his force of under 2,000 was sufficient, but then the raid should have been sudden; if he was meant to be an outpost in front of Bloemfontein he should have been properly supported, instead of being left nearly forty miles from any considerable force in a position of considerable risk from sudden attack. When, however, Lord Roberts understood that Broadwood was in danger he showed the rapidity of decision habitual with him in a crisis, and took all reasonable measures to help him. Unfortunately, few of the subordinates employed on this occasion by Lord Roberts showed the same readiness to grasp

the essential conditions of a crisis as their supple adversary de Wet. Broadwood himself, it is true, after his first initial mistake in not assuring himself personally that sufficient patrols had been sent out from the waterworks, did all that was possible to retrieve the disaster, for it can hardly be laid to his charge that he was not well seconded by his cavalry. But Martyr lost a great chance. Colvile could perhaps not have effected more than he did; but he also had an opportunity, which he missed, of showing push and initiative. The best that can be said for him is that he did nothing which would have been amiss in ordinary circumstances; but the circumstances were extraordinary. French was handicapped on the 31st by the want of certain information as to what the Boers were actually doing only eight or nine miles away; if he had known more definitely and had pushed on to Waterval Drift, or even to Boesman's Kop, on that evening, his energy, which is beyond question, might have retrieved the disaster.

but gallantry of the soldiers.

To Englishmen the most consoling feature of the day is the magnificent gallantry displayed by the officers and private soldiers of Broadwood's artillery and mounted infantry. The behaviour of "Q" Battery, which received only four V.C.'s for its conduct on that day, because the allocation of that honour is wisely limited, touched the hearts of their countrymen all the world over, and indeed it is hard to exaggerate the coolness and courage displayed by all ranks. The steady gallantry of the mounted infantry attracted less attention at the time, but was no less splendid. As so often has been the case in our military annals, a disaster was saved from disgrace by the behaviour of the soldiers.*

* It is a great pity that, although nearly all the chief performers at Sannah's Post were in the neighbourhood of Bloemfontein for the whole of April, no proper inquiry was ever made into the circumstances. A good deal of discussion subsequently took place as to the exact part taken by General Colvile in the day's events, which might have been avoided if all the facts had been satisfactorily brought out at the time.

SKETCH OF SANNAH'S POST March 31, 1900.

Scale 3 inches to 1 Mile.

0 1/4 1/2 3/4 1 Mile

POSITIONS ABOUT 9·30 A.M.

DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
Guns

Koorn Spruit
Ratcliffe 2½ miles
Kraal
Drift
de Vlei
U. Bty.
Convoy
Upset gun
Wagon
Rimington's Guides
Roberts's Horse
1st M. I.
Dobell
Pretorius's Farm
From Bloemfontein 20 miles
Dam
Embankment
Railway under construction
Sannah's Post Stn
Cavalry
Burma M. I.
1 Co R.M.I.
Modder Drift
To Thaba 'Nchu 17 miles
Waterworks Pumping Station
Dam
River
Modder
T.M.I.N.Z.M.I.

POSITIONS ABOUT 10·15 A.M.

0 1 2 3 4 5 Scale of Miles

Waterval Drift
Boesman's Kop
From Bloemfontein 14 miles
Railway under constn
Koorn Spruit
Sannah's Post Stn
Waterworks
From Thaba 'Nchu 13 miles
Modder River

Spottiswoode & Co. 1st Edth. London

III

Satisfactory as this exploit of Sannah's Post must have been to de Wet, he had no intention of allowing its effect to be diminished by his own inaction. Without loss of time, on the evening of the battle, he had gone off by himself with a small party, leaving Olivier, Piet de Wet, A. P. Cronje and the bulk of their joint forces, to deal with Colvile. The next day, April 1st, he arrived at the farm Sterkfontein, about half way between Sannah's Post and Dewetsdorp, and there heard that a small force of English troops without guns was in Dewetsdorp. This force was composed of three companies of infantry from the Royal Irish Rifles, and of mounted infantry companies of the Northumberland Fusiliers and Royal Irish Rifles, about 400 all told, under the command of Captain McWhinnie of the Irish Rifles. The three infantry companies were those sent on by Gatacre in March from Smithfield to Helvetia,* whence they had been ordered by him to proceed to Dewetsdorp. Here they were joined by the two M.I. companies, which had been detached by him from Colonel Sitwell's M.I. corps. Lord Roberts had previously told him to occupy Dewetsdorp, if he could do so in sufficient force, but on learning on April 1 how small this detachment was, he had ordered its instant withdrawal, informing him at the same time of the disaster at Sannah's Post. Gatacre's order for the detachment to retire on the railway reached McWhinnie late that night, but no warning was given him of the close proximity of a victorious army of Boers. As soon as de Wet heard of this tempting prey, he sent an urgent message to his brother, who was about fifteen miles off, to detach 1,500 men and three guns under Generals Wessels, Froneman, and De Villiers, to rejoin him; meanwhile, he beat up all the men of the district, many of whom had surrendered and were living peaceably on their farms, with so much success that by the first evening he had collected 110 men locally. This incident is worth a passing notice, as it shows de Wet's power, even at this early

De Wet hears of another British detachment wandering about on, April 1.

He sends for reinforcements, and follows it up.

* See chap. i., p. 11.

stage, of arousing the slumbering energies of his people, and how mistaken Lord Roberts was in relying on the easy submission of so many burghers after his first victory.

Surprise and surrender of the British force at Mostert's Hoek on April 4.

On April 2 de Wet found that the English had left Dewetsdorp and were on the march to Reddersburg; so he despatched a messenger to warn his reinforcements and contented himself with following up the enemy on their north flank, concealing his small band in the valley which ran parallel to their line of march. Early on the 3rd he was joined by Froneman with 1,000 men and three Krupp guns at a farm on the Kaffir River north of the English bivouac at Oorlog's Poort,* and with the men he had raised locally and his own original party de Wet found himself in command of a force of about 2,000. Without allowing the newcomers time to off-saddle, although they had marched all the way from Sannah's Post since the afternoon of the previous day, he followed up the English force unperceived until, on the same morning, it reached Mostert's Hoek. This is a horse-shoe shaped ridge standing on a plain of undulating ground about four miles north-east of Reddersburg, and about eighteen from Bethany. The English force had first become aware of the Boer pursuit on approaching the ridge. Realising its defensive value, McWhinnie ordered the mounted infantry to seize its western extremity and the infantry the eastern. Here they hastily threw up a few stone sangars, but they had not much time for intrenching themselves, as the Boers very soon began bombarding them with their three Krupp guns, and crept up towards them under cover of the dongas and inequalities of the ground. At an early stage of the fight the two company commanders and a third officer of the mounted infantry were shot dead, but the total casualties were not numerous. That night the Boers drew off, and a messenger was sent by McWhinnie to the railway asking for reinforcements. But with the dawn of the 4th the assailants returned to the attack, and by 9.30 had carried the mounted infantry position; whereupon McWhinnie's whole force, exposed to fire from all sides,

* The messenger had arrived too late to stop De Villier's march on Dewetsdorp.

surrendered. After taking into consideration all the difficulties of the situation involved in a force of 400, without guns, fighting against one of 2,000, with three guns, on a ridge not easily defensible against superior numbers, yet the fact remains that at the time of surrender these 400 had suffered less than fifty casualties, ten being killed and thirty-seven wounded. If there had been no prospect of relief, even this small number of casualties might have justified surrender under the circumstances; but a messenger had been despatched to the railway less than twenty miles away, where it was known that there were British troops.

Gatacre's attempt to relieve it unsuccessful.

It is the more unfortunate that the detachment did not hold out a little longer, for at the moment of surrender help was close at hand. At 9.20 A.M. the advance scouts of a relieving force were on the ridge overlooking Reddersburg, whence they could hear the fight going on about five miles off, and they heard the last shot fired about 9.30 A.M. The first news of the straits of the detachment had arrived at Edenburg at 7 P.M. on the evening of the 3rd, brought by one of Montmorency's Scouts, who had just ridden in from Dewetsdorp. Lord Roberts, at Bloemfontein, and General Gatacre, at Springfontein, were immediately informed, and Lord Roberts gave orders for a relief force to start. General Gatacre lost no time in sending Colonel Sitwell with two M.I. companies on to Bethany. Here they found Montmorency's Scouts and the 1st Battalion of the Camerons, who had been sent down from Bloemfontein during the night. Early on the morning of the 4th the Scouts and a company of M.I. were sent on to reconnoitre, and at 8 A.M. General Gatacre, who had come up by train, marched out with an advance guard consisting of two M.I. companies and a battery (74th R.F.A.) under Colonel Sitwell, followed by the Camerons * and a couple more batteries. As has been already stated, the Scouts heard the last of the fight at Mostert's Hoek from a ridge about

* The choice of the Camerons by the Headquarters Staff was, perhaps, unfortunate, as they had only just arrived from Egypt and were naturally not in their fittest condition for marching; although, as it turned out, they were not called upon for serious exertions.

a mile west of Reddersburg, but they went no further, and it was not before 10 A.M. that Gatacre's advance guard had reached this ridge. The Boers were in and about the town of Reddersburg, covering the main force at Mostert's Hoek, but though Sitwell was at first sent to make a turning movement on the north of the town, Gatacre decided against making any attempt to come up with de Wet's force, or even securing Reddersburg, and began to retreat on Bethany. After he had retired about four miles he received an order from Lord Kitchener to seize Reddersburg at once, so he countermarched and occupied the village after firing a few shots and capturing a couple of Boers. Next morning (April 5), having received another order at midnight to return to Bethany at once, he did so.

General Gatacre sent home.

A few days after this incident General Gatacre was summoned to Bloemfontein by Lord Roberts and sent back to England, being replaced in his command of the Third Division by Major-General Chermside, who had previously had charge of the 14th Brigade in Tucker's Division. Gatacre was a man whose personal bravery was beyond question, his zeal and love for his profession were also undoubted, and if he had any failing in this respect it was that, being himself almost without the sense of fatigue, he expected his men to be equally tireless. But his two misfortunes at Stormberg and at Reddersburg were not calculated to inspire trust in the men he led, or the self-confidence essential to a commander. Lord Roberts's own too ready confidence in the effect of his victories was no doubt partly to blame for the haphazard way in which Gatacre allowed the luckless detachment of the Irish Rifles to wander about the country; but he had been specifically told that he was only to occupy Dewetsdorp if he had enough troops at his disposal, and it is difficult to excuse his failure to warn McWhinnie of the Sannah's Post disaster when he sent him the order to retire. The various instructions sent to him from Bloemfontein on April 4 show that the circumstances were not entirely apprehended by the Headquarters Staff, but in a case like this it cannot be too strongly emphasized that it is the business of the commander on the spot to use every possible

means of retrieving disaster on his own responsibility. There is no doubt that Gatacre should have occupied Reddersburg and at least attempted to follow up de Wet with his capture, quite irrespective of any orders from Bloemfontein. He might not have achieved more than he did, but at any rate the attempt would have taken away some of the disgrace of a British force of 400 having had to surrender actually within five miles of a relieving force.

Roberts finds serious measures necessary to check the Boers before he can advance further.

These two serious reverses within the space of five days, whereby de Wet had captured 1,000 prisoners, seven guns, and a convoy full of stores, rudely awoke Lord Roberts from his optimistic impressions as to the demoralization of the Boers, and showed him that all hope of being in Kroonstad early in April must now be laid aside. Owing to the losses and exhaustion of the cavalry horses at Karee Siding and Sannah's Post, he was compelled to give up a projected advance on Brandfort for the 6th April, and he also had to face the possibility of his communications being cut. South of Bloemfontein, in the Free State, there was only one division distributed along the railway, besides some isolated garrisons of the Colonial Division, which had its headquarters at Aliwal North in Cape Colony. Lord Roberts was so convinced that de Wet would now adopt the obvious course of sweeping down south with his victorious forces, cutting the railway, and raising the standard of rebellion anew in Cape Colony, that he ordered the withdrawal of all the small garrisons in Helvetia, Smithfield, Rouxville, and Zastron, leaving all those who had surrendered on the promise of British protection to the vengeance of their compatriots; he sent Kitchener down the line to make certain that the garrisons at all the bridges were on the alert, especially at the important stations of Bethulie and Norval's Pont; and he ordered part of the division which Buller was sending him from Natal to land at East London and proceed to Aliwal North. Nine thousand Boers were actually reported to be marching on Bethulie, and for some days the lines of communication seemed to be in great jeopardy.

De Wet's chance.

De Wet had so far been very successful in his little raids; no doubt he had been very fortunate, but his readiness

to seize the occasion immediately it was presented to him must be set to his credit, and in war especially is it true that Fortune rarely smiles on the leader undeserving of her. Now, however, de Wet's generalship was put to the test by a choice which was offered him of two alternative courses. On the one hand there was nothing to prevent his sweeping down south with all his available men, and either making another raid into Cape Colony, or else contenting himself with constant attacks on the line of railway so as to delay indefinitely Lord Roberts's advance, and even to make his position at Bloemfontein precarious. No doubt Lord Roberts could in time have crushed him, but it would have been a lengthy business. But there was another alternative, and de Wet was led astray from this promising plan by what seemed to him at the moment a more tempting bait. In Wepener, on the Basutoland frontier, he heard that there was a party of the Colonial Division which had already been receiving the attentions of some of Olivier's and Grobler's commandos. Now the Boers did not love the English, but the loyal Colonials who fought against them they hated with an especially bitter hatred, partly because they were African born and so should, according to their notions, have been Afrikander in sentiment, partly because of their efficiency against themselves.* Whether because he thought the task of subduing these Colonials would be a short affair, or that it would be wise to satisfy his burghers' hatred, or even because a similar hatred influenced him personally, he was turned aside from what he seems himself to have realised would have been his best policy, and took Wessels along with him to Wepener.

He lets it go, and turns to Wepener.

The Colonial force at Wepener

Wepener is a little town on the Basuto border under the shadow of the Jammersberg, named after a Commandant Wepener who took part in the 1865–8 Basuto war. On March 24 a small force of 160 horse had been detached thither from the Colonial Division at Aliwal North to assist

* It is true that a great number of men in the Colonial Division were not Colonial born, and a large proportion of the officers were English, but the Boers naturally did not examine too closely the composition of the force.

Captain Goddard in collecting arms and distributing proclamations. They found, however, before they had gone very far that they could not treat the Wepener district in the same holiday fashion that had been possible at Smithfield, Zastron, and Rouxville, as some of the Boers who had gone up to Ladybrand with Grobler and Olivier were returning south; accordingly, reinforcements were sent for. On March 29 the first detachment reached Wepener, and on the following day a company of the Royal Scots M.I. from Gatacre's division, under Captain Molyneux Seel, arrived from Smithfield, followed by a few Engineers under Major Cedric Maxwell, R.E., who took over the command. At first the garrison chiefly busied themselves with the task of receiving worthless arms from surrendering Boers, and in dealing with prominent malcontents; but they very soon found that they would have plenty to do in defending their own position. Fresh reinforcements from Brabant were coming up by forced marches until, by the evening of April 4, the force numbered 1,850 men, with seven guns and six Maxims. Meanwhile, Major Maxwell had made the best use of his time. Full information of the Boer forces approaching to invest the garrison was obtained by scouting parties, and intrenchments were begun. It had been Major Maxwell's first intention to hold the town, and he began intrenching on the south side of the bridge over the Caledon at Jammersberg Drift; but, on finding that the garrison of Smithfield was retiring, and that the Boers were moving round to the south so as to cut him off from Aliwal North, he decided to cross the Caledon River and take up a stronger position on some hills north of the drift. These hills formed a rough circle about seven miles in circumference, with a broken plain in the centre about three miles across. Water was obtainable from two vleys in the west and north-east corners of the ground. The Caledon River runs east and south of the circle, the exits of which are in the south-east corner, where the road to Wepener crosses the bridge over the Jammersberg Drift; on the north-west, where the Wepener road goes off towards Dewetsdorp; and by the Ladybrand road on the north. On the east, beyond the river, the lofty Jammersberg Mountain

take measures to stand a siege.

The Jammersberg Bridge position.

commands the circle, and there are good artillery positions on kopjes outside the defenders' line. The weakest point of the defence was on the south-west, but otherwise it was a strong position to hold against such bad siege fighters as the Boers. Everything for the defence was carefully thought out by Major Maxwell—trenches were dug, gun positions selected by Captain Lukin, who commanded the artillery,* and the shops and houses of Wepener were ransacked for stores of food and medical appliances; a hospital was improvised out of a miller's house near the drift, signallers were sent up to Mafeteng in Basutoland to keep in touch with the signallers to be placed at Jammersberg Drift, and a system of native runners was organised.

Dispositions of Dalgety's force.

On April 4 Commandant Banks, who led a party of scouts, sent in a flag of truce demanding the surrender of the garrison, and Major Maxwell returned the usual answer. On the 5th Colonel Dalgety, who had arrived on the previous evening and as senior officer had taken over the command, moved out with all the troops from Wepener to the Jammersberg Drift position, where they were placed in the following order: On the north-east, which being the highest point afforded a good view over the whole position, were the 2nd Brabant's Horse; next to them on the north front, and separated from them by the Ladybrand road, were the 1st Brabant's Horse; while the north-west front, consisting of a gentle slope crowned by a rocky kopje, was held by two squadrons of the Kaffrarian Rifles. Across the Dewetsdorp road the Cape Mounted Rifles held the western face, and on the south were two squadrons of 2nd Brabant's Horse, and another detachment of C.M.R. On two flat-topped kopjes commanding the bridge to the south-east and above the hospital were some more of the Kaffrarian Rifles. Below them were a couple of guns and two Maxims; the other guns were at first placed on the north of the position but were moved about as need arose. The Royal Scots M.I. and Driscoll's Scouts were kept as a reserve in the centre.

* It was even considered whether it would be advisable to forestall the Boers by occupying Jammersberg Mountain, but eventually decided in the negative, as a force there would have been too isolated.

Every morning the garrison stood to arms at 4 A.M. and manned the trenches, while pickets were sent out beyond them. On the 6th Dalgety sent a detachment of Kaffrarian Rifles seven miles south to hold Bastard's Ford over the Caledon as an additional protection to his rear, about which he was nervous. But finding that the river was fordable for some distance on both sides of the drift, this detachment returned to camp.

De Wet's investing force.

It was lucky for the defenders that the Boers gave them ample opportunity for preparation. It was not until the morning of the 9th that de Wet had marshalled all his forces round the position. By that time Wessels and Haasbroek from de Wet's own force were to the south and south-east between Jammersberg Drift and Wepener, which they had occupied; De Villiers was on the west; and Olivier completed the cordon on the north. Nearly all the men who had been at Sannah's Post on the evening of 31st March had come up to invest the Colonials; the only exceptions being that Piet de Wet, with about 1,500 men, was left to guard the Thaba 'Nchu and Sannah's Post district, and that Froneman was sent with 500 of the Smithfield commando to Smithfield.* Thus de Wet had about 6,000 men flushed and eager from their recent successes, with seven guns and some pom-poms, against less than 2,000 Colonials.

The siege begins on April 9.

At four o'clock on the morning of April 9th the Colonials had stood to arms as usual, and by about 6.30 had returned to their camps in rear of their respective positions, when the signal for the Boer attack was given by a shell which came swishing into the Royal Scots' camp from a Krupp on a flat-topped kopje to the west. The men immediately struck tents and rushed to reinforce the trenches; at first the fire seemed chiefly directed against the Kaffrarians on the north-west, but very soon it appeared that the Boers were making their most determined attack on the C.M.R. Their position was the worst to defend since, partly

* This expedition accomplished nothing, as it found the Smithfield garrison leaving as they approached. It is an illustration of the looseness of Boer discipline and organisation that when Froneman, the general in command, wanted to pursue the retreating English, the commandant of the Smithfield men, Swanepoel, flatly refused to let his men pursue, and Froneman seems to have had no means of making him.

owing to the rocky nature of the ground, and partly to their own remissness, it was as yet hardly intrenched at all, and was much lower than the other posts. While the artillery fire went on, Boer snipers had crept up the river bed and were marking down the defenders. However, the C.M.R. kept up the fight bravely, nobly inspired by their commanding officer, Major Sprenger, who walked about among his men giving orders and words of encouragement, and seeming to bear a charmed life as the bullets and shells flew about him. But at last, just as he was going to sit down, he fell, shot through the heart. Colonel Dalgety, who spent most of the day at the chief point of danger near the trenches of his own regiment, had already sent for the troops in reserve, and just after Major Sprenger had fallen, Driscoll's Scouts, closely followed by the company of Royal Scots, arrived to reinforce the hard-pressed C.M.R. They had had an adventurous ride across the open from their bivouac by the farmhouse, and, except for the shelter of a few undulations, they were exposed during the whole of the two miles' ride to the concentrated fire of two Maxims, a pom-pom, and rifles, and during the last part, when they dismounted and walked along the ridge to the south-west corner, a field gun also was turned upon them. This advance cost the Scouts one killed and thirteen wounded, and the Royal Scots three killed and nine wounded. The Scouts took up a position on the left of the C.M.R. and the Royal Scots still further to their left; but their advent brought little relief to the furious attack on the position. The C.M.R. were still in the most exposed places, being subject to an enfilading fire from the river bank as well as to the frontal attack from the west, and as early as 10 o'clock their ammunition was running low; a run across the open for about 150 yards was the only method of getting fresh supplies, and was the cause of many casualties; in one case, out of a party of six men who ventured to run, only one returned safely to his trench. The fire did not slacken till about midday, but the C.M.R., backed up by the Royal Scots and the Scouts, and later by a detachment of Brabant's Horse sent to their assistance, could not be moved from

their exposed positions. The attack was not pressed home during the afternoon, but the defenders got no rest till well on into the night, as guns and rifles kept up an intermittent fire on anybody who appeared on the plain immediately behind their schanzes. Even when the darkness came on, the men had to work for hours at making trenches in the ungrateful rock. All day, too, they had gone without food and water, and the wounded had in many cases been lying where they fell, exposed to the heat of the sun and then to the chill of the night, for it was not till night-time that the ambulances and supply wagons could be brought up to the fire-swept zone.

Though the chief fighting occurred in this south-west corner, the defenders had not been idle over the rest of the field. The bridge over the Caledon, held by the Kaffrarians, was hotly attacked; but here, too, the Boers were driven off, and without much loss. On the north-west, Brabant's Horse repelled an attack by Olivier, while the fire from the Boer guns surrounding the position was very skilfully met by Captain Lukin, who manœuvred his guns in such a way as to keep even with his opponents throughout the siege.

Determination of the Colonials to hold out.

On this first day the casualties on the British side were about seventy, but otherwise the Boers had not gained a point. If the Boers had made up their minds to catch the Colonials, the Colonials were even more determined not to be caught. They felt it was a Colonial affair and meant to show that they could settle it for themselves. They may have been spurred on, too, by the knowledge that they were in the somewhat unique position of fighting before a highly critical audience, being almost within sight of a large force of Basutos, assembled on the border of their land, which was "out of touch"; and with all their Colonial associations they felt that it would never do for the "niggers" to see them beaten by the Boers. To strengthen their determination to hold out, a heliographic message came through Basutoland from General Brabant to say that he would relieve them in three days.

The night attack of April 10.

On the following day (10th) the defenders were rewarded for the work done in the trenches during the night, espe-

cially in the C.M.R., Scouts', and Royal Scots' positions, by their comparative immunity from casualties in spite of the heavy rifle and gun fire which the Boers kept up. But fresh reinforcements came to the assailants from the Rouxville direction, and at night one of the most determined assaults of the siege was made on the exposed C.M.R. position. About 8 o'clock some sniping was begun against the pickets on guard over the trenches at the extreme right of the C.M.R. lines, and was kept up in a desultory fashion for about two hours; then suddenly about 10 o'clock a fierce volley was fired at the pickets. As they ran back to their trenches, the Boers under Banks's leadership were heard closely following them up the hill. These were received with a volley from one of the trenches, and after several of the party had fallen they retired to cover. But the attack was soon renewed, and was extended all along the western line. The Boers made several attempts to outflank the trenches by creeping round by the western vley. Once such an attempt was momentarily frustrated by posting seven men on some rocks to the right, although all the seven were either killed or wounded; and later some of Driscoll's Scouts were brought up from their trenches, where the attack was not pressed home, to defend the position between the C.M.R. trenches and the vley. On till past 2 in the morning the Boers kept up the attack, and only finally retired when they had made a rush right up to the trenches and had been repulsed by the bayonet. The battle was fought almost entirely in the dark, for the moon had gone down about 10 o'clock, when the first charge was made. On this occasion the Boer forces attacking were estimated at 500, and the losses on both sides were comparatively heavy.

Progress of the siege, April 9–24.

These two determined attacks were the prelude to daily assaults on one or more points in the British lines during the whole duration of the siege. Nor were the attacks of the Boers the only trouble of the defenders. On the night of the 12th, and for four days on end from the 15th, rain came down almost continuously, half filling the trenches with water; the defenders had to lie down in the rain and fight all day in the rain, while the Royal

Scots, the C.M.R., and the Scouts were so situated that during the whole sixteen days of the siege they could not leave the trenches even at night, and had nothing but the cold food and water which were brought to them cautiously every evening. Still the rain caused almost as much discomfort to the Boers, and had a more dispiriting effect; they also suffered from a lack of ammunition for their guns, so that even though they brought two field guns and a pom-pom into a commanding position on a spur of the Jammersberg, their artillery fire became too rare to be very effective. Moreover, as the siege went on they became nervous about relief forces reported to be on the way, and had to detach parties to hold them. Nevertheless, the investment of Dalgety's force remained until the end sufficiently close to keep the defenders constantly on the watch. The northern side, the Jammersberg bridge, and the C.M.R. trenches were each in turn attacked, and on the 24th April a combined assault was delivered by guns and riflemen simultaneously on three sides of the enclosure. But the Boers never gained any ground permanently.

The siege raised, April 25.

All this time messages had been coming through to the garrison from Lord Roberts to say that help was at hand, and one telling the garrison that, if necessary, they should retire into Basutoland. This they could not have done in any case, as most of their horses, exposed in the centre, had soon been shot down; moreover from the first they had made up their minds not to resort to this expedient. But by the 25th their ammunition was getting very low, so that they were not ill-pleased when on that day the last body of besiegers finally moved off and Generals Hart and Brabant, followed by General Brabazon with some Yeomanry, rode into Wepener. During the siege the total killed of the defenders had been 33 and wounded 133, of which total the original number of 400 C.M.R. contributed no less than 21 dead and 75 wounded.

Reasons for the successful defence by the Colonials.

Thus ended the siege of Wepener, not comparable of course for length to the other sieges of Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking, but nevertheless one of the noteworthy incidents of the war. That the Boers were foolish, as they were

in nearly all their sieges, in allowing themselves to be kept in such large force round this comparatively unimportant position, is obvious when they might have been taking vigorous action against Lord Roberts's communications; and their delay in commencing the siege enabled the garrison to make adequate preparations. But their preliminary attacks were vigorous enough, far more so than was the case at the beginning of the more famous sieges. Their failure is due to the fine defensive position chosen by Major Maxwell, to his exhaustive preparations for a siege, and, above all, to the splendid courage and *esprit de corps* shown by the defenders, whose achievement was the more noteworthy as they never had any relief in the trenches during the whole sixteen days. Even the width of circumference, which at first sight seemed to tell against the defenders, resulted in a positive advantage to them; for they thereby had plenty of room to move about in and still had the inner line,* while the Boers had the corresponding disadvantage of a wide area to attack. Although Lord Roberts was hardly justified in allowing Wepener to be occupied before he could ensure its communications, still the necessity of holding the place when it had been once occupied, if only for the effect on the natives, was undoubted; and, as it turned out, the long siege diverted de Wet's considerable force from what might have proved a dangerous attack further south.

Measures taken by Roberts to relieve Wepener.

When Lord Roberts heard of the straits of the Wepener garrison he set in motion two columns to relieve the pressure on it. At that time Tucker's Division was well employed to the north of Bloemfontein, watching De la Rey and the Boer force between Brandfort and Thaba 'Nchu; Kelly Kenny's Division provided the garrison of Bloemfontein, where also French and Colvile were refitting their divisions; the Guards were holding the stations and bridges immediately south of the capital; and one of Chermside's brigades was required

* What disadvantage there may have been in a dispersal of forces was overcome by Colonel Dalgety's good staff arrangements, for he took care that his staff officer, Captain C. R. Grant, should daily be in personal communication with each squadron. Thus a thorough connection was established between the neighbouring regiments, and each squadron commander could devote his undivided energy to his immediate front.

DIRECTIONS.

British

Boers

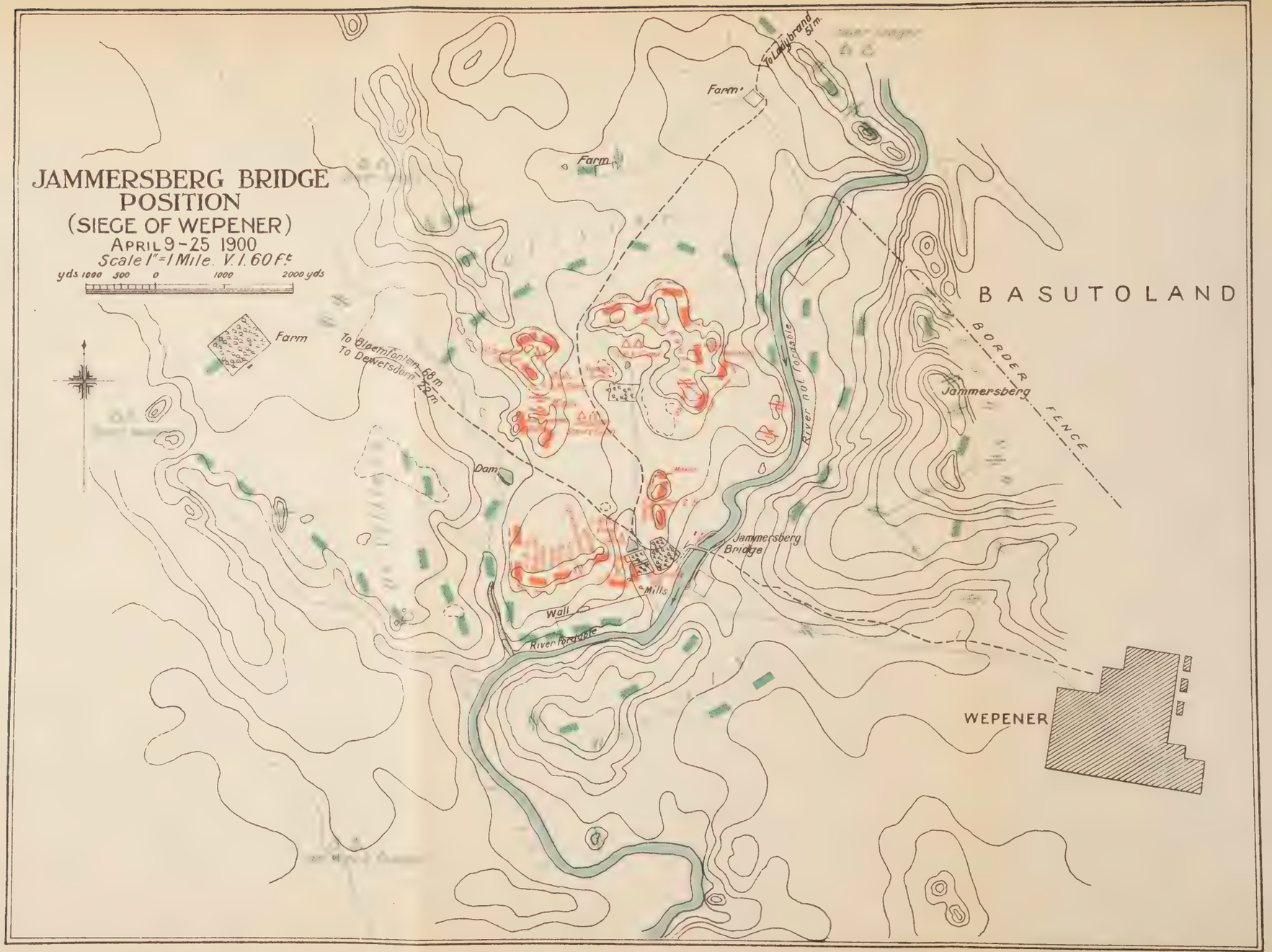
Guns

Trenches

As the guns on both sides were shifted about during the siege, the various positions shown are only temporary & are not meant to indicate the actual number of guns. These were:-

British: 13 (7 guns & 6 maxims)

Boer: 7 guns & some pompoms.



Spottiswoode & Co Ltd Lith. London.

to hold the railway to the Orange River. The troops available therefore were: the other brigade of Chermside's Division, the new Eighth Division, which was now arriving from England under Lieut.-General Sir Leslie Rundle, and had been ordered to concentrate at Edenburg, the remainder of the Colonial Division left at Aliwal North, and half Hart's Brigade, which was to be detached from Hunter's Division, now on its way round from Natal. In addition to these, the Yeomanry had now arrived in sufficient numbers for a division of them to be formed under General Brabazon available for work in the south-eastern Free State.

The plan was that two columns should converge on Wepener from the west and the south. The southern column was to start from Aliwal North and to consist of Brabant's Colonial Division and Hart's half brigade, and to be under the command of Hart. The other column, to consist of one of Chermside's brigades, Rundle's Division, and Brabazon's Yeomanry, all under Rundle, was to march from the railway line through Reddersburg on to Dewetsdorp, and it was hoped that even if this column could not march through to Wepener the pressure on Dewetsdorp would bring up most of the investing force to defend it, and so relieve Dalgety's force.

Hart and Brabant advance to Wepener from Aliwal North, April 14–25.

Of the two columns the southern had the easier task. Lord Kitchener himself superintended the arrangements for the relief, and as Hart had not yet come up from East London he sent Brabant's Division ahead on the 14th. De Wet had already detached Froneman, who had returned to him from Smithfield with his 500 burghers and 500 more whom he had collected from farms on his march, to oppose this move from the south, and later he sent Olivier with 300 more men and two guns to support him. On the 15th Brabant occupied Rouxville, driving about 400 of these Boers before him, and two days later was joined there by Hart. The two forces * continued their march without opposition until the 21st, when Brabant, who was in front, came upon

* Brabant, who had been strengthened by the New Zealand Rough-riders and the Malta M.I. (400 altogether), could muster 1,200 all told and two guns. Hart had the Somerset L.I., the Border Regiment, three companies Royal Irish Rifles, and the 8th Field Battery.

a force of 600 Boers under Froneman holding a strong position on Boesman's Kop, twenty miles south of Wepener. About sixty Boers, in their anxiety to overpower the advance scouts of Brabant's force, rushed down from their safe position on the mountain to a position on the plain, whence the Colonials picked them off at leisure; but this success was not followed up by any further effort that day, although it is possible that if Hart had sanctioned a night attack on the position the whole force of Boers might have been captured. Again next day the opportunity was wasted; the Colonials were ordered to make a turning movement to the east and to take the Boers in rear while Hart made a frontal attack, but the attack was not pushed home, though the Boers retreated in the night. On the 23rd Brabant was again sent ahead and came into touch with the Boers, whom he drove on, and on the 24th it was found that 300 of them were holding another position about twelve miles from Wepener. After another indecisive attack the Boers dispersed as before at night and the column was able to march without opposition into Wepener on the next day.

Rundle's advance towards Dewetsdorp.

Lord Roberts's detailed instructions to Rundle on April 13 were to advance on Dewetsdorp and then, if he found Wepener still being besieged, to place himself so as to cut off the Boer forces who were certain to move north from thence; if necessary, assistance would be sent to him from Bloemfontein, but Lord Roberts was anxious to have the business concluded by April 23, as he hoped on that day to begin his own advance along the railway. Already on April 11 Chermside had started operations by re-occupying Reddersburg with the 22nd Brigade under Major-General Allen, five companies of M.I. under Colonel Sitwell, and the 39th and 68th Batteries, and he was joined there on the following day by the Highland Light Infantry from Colvile's Division. Thence he moved on to Rosendal, occasionally coming into touch with the enemy's scouts. There was some delay with Rundle's Division, which had not yet completely arrived from England, and was not fully equipped with transport and medical supplies. However, by the 19th Rundle had concentrated at Rosendal, in addition to Chermside's force, the

17th Brigade under General Boyes, a battalion of Campbell's brigade (the 16th), the 4th and 7th Battalions of Imperial Yeomanry under General Brabazon, and a third battery, his column amounting to about 12,000 men with twenty-four guns. Two more battalions of Campbell's brigade with a battery and some mounted troops were left to hold the communication with the railway. Christiaan de Wet, on hearing of the English relief column's advance on Dewetsdorp, ordered his brother Piet with Andries P. Cronje to move thither from the waterworks and occupy a defensive position; at the same time he detached Wessels and Fourie from his troops round Wepener to reinforce them. The Boers reached Dewetsdorp on the morning of April 20; they had a force of about 2,500 men, with Andersen's Krupp battery and a pom-pom. At Leeuwkop, half-way between Bloemfontein and Dewetsdorp and commanding the main road, Lemmer had a force of 1,000 men with three guns and two pom-poms.

Boer dispositions to defend it.

Dewetsdorp nestles under a semicircle of hills open to the north-east, and extending away into a broad plateau of irregular shape towards the farms Constantia on the west, and Wakkerstroom on the south-west. Piet de Wet placed his force on the semicircle and in advanced positions on the plateau. Rundle, who on the night of the 19th had bivouacked at Oorlog's Poort, about twelve miles from Dewetsdorp, next morning sent forward Brabazon's Yeomanry with Sitwell's M.I. as a covering force to reconnoitre the position, and followed on with the infantry. About three miles from Dewetsdorp, near the farm Wakkerstroom, Boer scouts were to be seen scattered in small groups along the plateau, but they did not await the attack of the M.I., who soon seized its south-western edge, and then galloped up to a kopje rising out of it. Thereupon the Boer main position on a further kopje to the north unmasked itself, and three companies of M.I. together with Montmorency's Scouts were exposed to both gun and rifle fire at a range of about 1,200 yards on the first kopje from 10 A.M. to after 3 P.M. Two guns were brought on to the plateau near Wakkerstroom Farm, and a flank attack was attempted against the Boer position by a move-

Rundle arrives close to Dewetsdorp, April 20.

ment of some Yeomanry and a company of M.I. round by the right, but they were driven back by pom-pom and rifle fire within a range of 800 yards of the Boer position. At last the Worcesters, at the head of the main body of infantry, advanced to relieve the M.I. on the kopje, whose ammunition was beginning to run very low. As the Worcesters came across the plateau they were exposed to a heavy though harmless fire from Boer guns and rifles, but they relieved the M.I. about 4 P.M., and the Boer artillery whose ammunition was reduced to two rounds for each gun was withdrawn for the day; Rundle also withdrew his men below the plateau.*

Rundle misses his opportunity of taking Dewetsdorp by a *coup de main.*

Rundle missed a great opportunity on the 20th April. It is true that his own infantry, having recently come off ship-board, were not in very good condition; but on that day they had marched only seven miles from Oorlog's Poort, and Chermside's infantry were well seasoned. He might therefore well have hurried his infantry forward very much earlier in support of the mounted troops and delivered a vigorous assault on the Boer trenches. Had he done so he would probably have carried Dewetsdorp at once. For the Boers, beside being short of ammunition on that day, were also comparatively new to the ground, and they appear themselves, from one of their accounts, to have thought they had had a lucky escape. One reason for Rundle's hesitation to attack the position was no doubt the impression made on him by the warning issued previously by Lord Roberts against frontal attacks, added to his apprehension lest, with the somewhat raw Yeomanry confided to him, a wide turning movement might be too risky. Moreover, he was no doubt already expecting assistance. He had on the previous day informed Lord Roberts of the Boer commando on Leeuwkop, and on the 20th Pole-Carew had been ordered to concentrate the Eleventh Division at Springfield. On the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd various reconnoitring expeditions were carried out; the artillery had some vigorous duels, during which the Boers, now again supplied with ammunition, shelled the English convoy, and the English gunners put most of the men serving a Boer gun out of action

Futile operations round Dewetsdorp, April 21–23.

* Twenty men of the Worcester regiment on cook's fatigue strayed in the dark into the Boer lines and were taken prisoners.

and caused its withdrawal; but there was not much result from all this desultory fighting. Meanwhile Roberts had become so impressed with Rundle's representations as to the strong position of the Boers before Dewetsdorp, and by his fear that Rundle would not be able, even if he attacked successfully, to cut off their retreat north, that on the 22nd he told him not to attack, as he had then made up his mind to do, until he was in touch with Pole-Carew's force coming from the north-west.

Roberts sends assistance to Rundle.

On the 20th Pole-Carew's Division, consisting of the Guards' Brigade and Stephenson's 18th Brigade, was at Springfield, east of Bloemfontein. On the following day he was joined by Dickson's 4th Cavalry Brigade, Alderson's M.I., three batteries, and two naval guns, and on the 22nd French was told to take on Gordon's 3rd Cavalry Brigade, join forces with Pole-Carew at Leeuwkop, and assume control of all the forces to be concentrated on Dewetsdorp. At the same time Colvile was ordered to send Smith-Dorrien's 19th Brigade to Springfield to take the place of the 18th Brigade, and Ian Hamilton with Ridley's M.I. to push on to the waterworks, seize them, and if possible work through to Thaba 'Nchu, while Tucker with his 7th Division was still to remain near Karee Siding. The idea was a simple one; French's and Pole-Carew's troops were to push the Boers between Dewetsdorp and Bloemfontein back on to Dewetsdorp; Rundle and Chermside in their turn were to force up all the Boers at Dewetsdorp and Wepener in a northerly direction. French, by that time, was to be ready to cut them off on the road between Dewetsdorp and Thaba 'Nchu, being supported at the latter place by Ian Hamilton. Colvile and Tucker would be so placed as to prevent any possible junction between the Boers north of the Thaba 'Nchu-Bloemfontein line and those south of it. The plan was excellent, and should, if carried out, have resulted in another capture almost as important as that of Paardeberg. But the Boers had no mind to be caught again, and this time were led by a general who was enough of a tactician to prevent it. De Wet saw that the only thing to do was to retreat while there was yet time. In order to ensure this, it was necessary to delay French's

Original idea for co-operating forces under Pole-Carew, French, and Ian Hamilton.

advance long enough for the lines of Boer wagons to get safely to Thaba 'Nchu. For this purpose Lemmer was well placed at Leeuwkop, and Fourie was detached from Dewetsdorp to assist him by holding Roodekop, a hill midway to Leeuwkop.

Pole-Carew attacks Lemmer at Leeuwkop on April 22.

Lemmer had taken up a strong position astride the Dewetsdorp road, his centre at Kromspruit being at the apex of a triangle formed by the hills, while the flanks, about seven miles apart, were holding the extremities of the base, the right on the Donkerpoort ridge, and the left, where he had placed his principal strength, on the compact mass of Leeuwkop. On the 22nd French had not yet come up, so Pole-Carew was in command. His plan was for Stephenson, with the 18th Brigade and a battery, to pierce the Boer centre at Kromspruit, while Alderson's M.I., the brigade of Guards, and two batteries, made a strong feint on the front and round to the south-west of Leeuwkop, and Dickson, with the 4th Cavalry Brigade and a horse battery, turned their right at Donkerpoort and cut off their retreat. The cavalry were somewhat unnecessarily checked by pom-pom fire, and a battery which should have supported the Guards' demonstration against Leeuwkop did not arrive in time; but Stephenson turned the Boers out of their position on Kromspruit, so that by the evening Lemmer's main force on Leeuwkop was held on both flanks.

French assumes command of his own and Pole-Carew's columns on April 23.

On the morning of the 23rd French arrived and took charge of the operations. The Boers had left their main position on Leeuwkop during the night, so French was able to reach Tweede Geluk, about six miles off, without opposition except for a sharp bit of skirmishing on some kopjes at Rooipoort, which formed a south-eastern extension of Leeuwkop. But on the 24th the cavalry who went on in advance found that Lemmer's Boers from Leeuwkop, increased to about 1,200 by Fourie's reinforcements, were holding a range of hills extending for about six miles from Vlakfontein to Roodekop, and that the road to Dewetsdorp went over a nek near the centre of the Boer position. French attacked the position with both brigades, sending the 9th Lancers to a ridge on the left near Vlakfontein, the 7th Dragoon Guards

to their right, and the 8th and 14th Hussars further south, while the 16th and 17th Lancers were sent round to the right with pom-poms to seize Roodekop. The first four regiments occupied the heights assigned to them, but were subjected to a very heavy fire from the Boers, who were able to enfilade them from their positions to the north and east, and it was not till the remaining two Lancer regiments had seized the commanding situation on Roodekop and the pom-poms had been brought into action that the Boers gave ground. By 11 o'clock they had been finally driven off and were streaming away over the great plain which stretches out east of Roodekop in the direction of Thaba 'Nchu. French, however, would have saved much valuable time if he had simply seized Roodekop, whence the whole position could be enfiladed, and pressed on to cut off the Boer main force in Dewetsdorp, instead of unnecessarily carrying the whole ridge.

Lemmer and Fourie driven out of his path.

By this time French was in heliographic communication with Rundle, whose headquarters were at Wakkerstroom, and he instructed him to hold the west, south-west, and southern positions round Dewetsdorp, and to make his way to the east of the town, where he was to get into touch with Dickson. Dickson's instructions were to take the 3rd as well as his own 4th Cavalry Brigade across the Modder and work round to the east of Dewetsdorp, so as to cut off the Boer retreat towards Thaba 'Nchu; the Eleventh Division and Alderson's M.I. were to hold French's front. Dickson accordingly hurried on to secure the passage over the Modder. But there were still waspish little bands of the enemy which delayed the advance, and he was not able to get beyond Vaalbank, west of the Modder. The total loss of the cavalry this day was thirty-four, including several officers; the Boers had about an equal number of casualties. The infantry, who had been some distance behind, were merely spectators, and bivouacked at a farm five miles in rear of the cavalry.

Attempt to round up the Boers

On the following day, when Rundle and French met in Dewetsdorp, they found that all the Boers had fled. At this point the English operations seem to have lost all sense of direction. On April 25 the Boers from Roodekop, Dewetsdorp,

fails.

and Wepener had already trekked northwards, and French's cavalry, who had reached Rietpoort across the Modder by 8.15 in the morning, saw nothing of them but retreating wagons. Some attempt was made to pursue the wagons, but was not persisted in, and Pole-Carew's infantry bivouacked west of the Modder. Meanwhile Rundle had cautiously advanced on Dewetsdorp with his army in three columns, and left Chermside's brigade in the town, which was now cleared both of Boers and of supplies ; his mounted troops under Brabazon he sent on a turning movement on the south-east, and an infantry brigade to the north west. At this juncture French, bearing in mind his instructions to effect the relief of Wepener, reinforced Brabazon with some cavalry under Gordon, and sent them off to bring out the beleaguered garrison. This decision is somewhat inexplicable, as it was quite evident that the Boers were all moving north, and a message had actually come in from Basutoland to say that those round Wepener were retreating, and that Hart's force was within fourteen miles of Dalgety. Rundle seems to have had the surer instinct and urged a pursuit of the Boers, and Lord Roberts, as soon as he heard of the state of things, suggested that even an infantry brigade could march as fast as a Boer convoy with guns, and should start in pursuit. However, nothing further was done on that day. On the following day Pole-Carew's division returned to Bloemfontein with a large collection of sheep, cattle, and horses, the most tangible results of the operations. French, who had recalled Gordon, went on with his two cavalry brigades towards Thaba 'Nchu, Rundle following on behind him, and Chermside being left in Dewetsdorp.

Criticism of Rundle's and French's operations.

These operations afford an excellent illustration of favourite Boer tactics when they were hard pressed and outnumbered ; instead of waiting for a battle in force in which they were bound to be crushed, they began their retreat methodically while the fighting was still going on, sending forward just sufficient men into successive positions from which the enemy's advance could be delayed long enough for the retreat not to be interfered with. On this occasion observers on the Boer side were particularly struck with the

orderly way in which all the scattered commandos round Wepener and Dewetsdorp moved off in one direction at the word of command without a single hitch. But although the Boers escaped they had not gained any great results from the last month's operations; they had wasted their time over the siege of Wepener, whereas Lord Roberts had now definitely cleared all the Free State to the south and east of Bloemfontein, and during his march up and for several months after that this part of the Free State gave him no anxiety. But the operations afford a still better illustration of the futility of attempting to beat a mobile enemy like the Boers without the utmost rapidity of action and determination. Whether a better result might have been attained if General Rundle had been a little more venturesome at first and had forced the Dewetsdorp positions on the 20th or 21st is, of course, a doubtful point, but at any rate the siege of Wepener would have been raised sooner, and the Boer retreat would have been more of a rout. Rundle's delay, however, is perhaps more excusable, since he himself as well as most of his command were on this occasion introduced for the first time to Boer methods of warfare, nor had he even had an opportunity of gauging the capacity of his own troops. But no such excuse can be made for General French's delay on the 23rd and 24th, which gave the Boers ample time to mature their plans for escape.

Ian Hamilton seizes waterworks, April 23.

Meanwhile on the 23rd Ian Hamilton had seized the waterworks with Ridley's M.I. Brigade, and on the 24th he had been relieved there by Colvile with the Highland Brigade, two 4·7 guns, and the 87th Howitzer Battery. On that night he received information from Lord Roberts that the enemy had broken north from Wepener and were making for Thaba 'Nchu, and was told to make a suggestion. He suggested an immediate move on Thaba 'Nchu, and, suiting the action to the word, without waiting for a reply, started off on the morning of April 25 with his M.I. and with Smith-Dorrien's 19th Brigade, which never again rejoined the Ninth Division.

Forces Israel's Poort, April 25,

After the first few miles from the waterworks the road to Thaba 'Nchu leads into a shallow valley five or six miles

wide, but very gradually the features become more and more accentuated, until at last the rising ground on either flank becomes mountainous, so as to be almost impracticable for mounted troops. The end of this funnel, as it might be called, is formed by the pass of Israel's Poort, which is about five miles from Thaba 'Nchu, and consists of five steep kopjes stretched in line across the entrance to the valley. As Ian Hamilton approached the pass, he found that it was occupied by the Boers in some force, and that they were also extended along the ridges on his flanks. This force, numbering about 1,500 men, was under Grobler. The position was evidently too strong to be taken by a frontal attack, especially as the attacking party would be subjected to an enfilading fire. To mislead the Boers, however, Hamilton sent forward the Canadians, under Colonel Otter, from Smith-Dorrien's Brigade, and Marshall's Horse, from the M.I., to the front, while he developed his main attack by a turning movement. Ridley was directed to march back with the rest of the M.I. until he came to a place on the left ridge which could easily be crossed, and thence to work round parallel to the original line of march and take the Poort in the rear; while Smith-Dorrien's infantry were sent straight up the same ridge to move along it and drive off the Boers. These dispositions were entirely successful, for the Boers, on finding their rear threatened, evacuated their position, and the English column occupied Thaba 'Nchu late that night without further opposition. The English casualties at Israel's Poort amounted to about twenty-five men, Colonel Otter, the commander of the Royal Canadians, being among the wounded.

and reaches Thaba 'Nchu.

Thaba 'Nchu was now again the centre of interest in the Free State operations. De Wet with his brother, Olivier, Grobler, Lemmer, and Fourie, had retired to a laager at Alexandria, six miles to the east of Thaba 'Nchu and protected by the hills which rise above the town; he had called up Philip Botha, who had been holding the triangle of country between Thaba 'Nchu, Bloemfontein, and Brandfort; so that altogether he could muster 4,000 men. His communications were kept open with Kroonstad by a telegraph post at Menschvretersberg, north of Alexandria. The rest of

Boers and English collected round Thaba 'Nchu.

the Boers who had been besieging Wepener were concentrated under De Villiers at Thaba Pachoa to oppose an expected movement of Brabant's division towards Ladybrand.

French attempts to surround Boer laager on April 28.

The cavalry arrived at Thaba 'Nchu on the 27th, and found that Hamilton had already made himself master of the side of Thaba 'Nchu Mountain nearest to the village. On the 28th French ordered operations, the object of which was to close in on the Boer laager behind the mountain and cut them off. Gordon's Cavalry Brigade was to go round the south of Thaba 'Nchu Mountain, Dickson's round the north, and the two were to meet behind the mountain and take the Boers between them. But the plan came to nothing, as neither brigade could get round the mountain; at the south-east corner Gordon found that the spurs of the mountain near Springhaan's Nek could not be turned without too wide a detour, or forced owing to the strong defensive position held on them by the Boers under Fourie. On the north-east, also, Dickson was brought to a standstill by strong flanking positions held by Olivier on outlying ridges of the main mountain, and towards the afternoon he was so hard pressed that if it had not been for a diversion caused by Ian Hamilton's infantry supporting his left rear his casualties would probably have been far more serious than they actually were. As it was the casualties in both cavalry brigades were thirty-seven, and the expedition was quite fruitless; its inception can only be attributed to defective mapping and defective intelligence. On the following day, however, a counter attack by Fourie on a convoy coming from Dewetsdorp was beaten off by Captain Willoughby who, with only a company of Scots Guards and another of Yeomanry, made a gallant defence against heavy odds.

Roberts now ready for advance. Boers and English disperse accordingly at end of April.

By this time Lord Roberts was ready for his own advance, so on April 30th Ian Hamilton moved up north to Houtnek, and on May 3rd French was called back to Bloemfontein, leaving Rundle in command at Thaba 'Nchu. For the same reason most of the Boers had also dispersed further north. Philip Botha was already in position at Houtnek when Ian Hamilton arrived there, and de Wet himself went up a few days later with the Ladybrand, Heilbron, and Frankfort com-

mandos to the Zand River. General De Villiers was sent to the Korannaberg, a range of mountains north-east of Thaba 'Nchu with the Ficksburg, Wepener, and Smithfield commandos, under Commandants De Villiers, Roux, and Potgieter, to protect the Ficksburg-Ladybrand district, while Olivier's and Grobler's commandos had already gone up towards Ficksburg. A considerable rearguard was nevertheless left among the Thaba 'Nchu hills to occupy General Rundle.

CHAPTER III

THE PLAN OF THE ADVANCE

No further obstacle to advance to Pretoria at beginning of May.

FROM the first moment of his arrival in Bloemfontein Lord Roberts had determined to advance as rapidly as possible on Pretoria. Owing to the various causes which have been set forth in the two preceding chapters, the start had been delayed at least a month longer than he had anticipated. But by the beginning of May reinforcements had arrived in sufficient numbers; there was a reserve of supplies in hand; and in spite of de Wet's pertinacious raids on the south-eastern Free State, the Boers had been definitely thrust beyond the British line. There was now no further reason for delay.

Reorganisation of troops effected during halt.

One good result of the long delay in Bloemfontein was that Lord Roberts had been able to make a thorough reorganisation and redistribution of the troops in South Africa.

In Natal.

In Natal the addition of the Ladysmith garrison had brought up General Buller's troops to 55,000 men, and enabled him to form four infantry divisions under Clery, Lyttelton, Warren,* and Hunter, besides three cavalry brigades under Brocklehurst, Burn Murdoch, and Dundonald. Immediately after the relief of Ladysmith, Lord Roberts decided that Warren's division would be more usefully employed in the Free State, but on Buller's urgent representation that he had work for all his troops he countermanded the order for the transfer. A month later, however, on April 4, finding that Buller was doing nothing with his large force, and that de Wet's activity made his own need

* When Warren was sent to command the troops in British Bechuanaland, Hildyard succeeded to his division.

more pressing, he sent for Hunter's division with the Imperial Light Horse.

In the west.

In the west Methuen's division, based on Kimberley, was made up to its full complement of two brigades by the addition of militia battalions, and the command of the new (20th) brigade thus formed was given to Colonel Paget of the Scots Guards. Hunter's division from Natal, consisting of Hart's and Barton's brigades, was also brought to Kimberley.* Further west still, Sir Charles Warren was put in command of a force of about 2,000 men to suppress the rebellion in British Bechuanaland.

In the centre.

But the most important reorganisation was of the troops in the centre of the Free State. Gatacre had been superseded by Chermside in April, and his division also was made up by Militia battalions to the strength of two brigades under Colonel Allen and Colonel W. G. Knox. Chermside's place in command of the 14th Brigade was taken by Colonel Maxwell. Brabant's Colonial division, hitherto under Gatacre's orders, was, at the end of April, subordinated to General Rundle. Clements's 12th Brigade was returned to Kelly-Kenny's Sixth Division when it arrived from Colesberg, and the 18th Brigade under Stephenson, which had taken its place, was formed, with the Guards' Brigade, into a new Eleventh Division under General Pole-Carew, Colonel Inigo Jones replacing him as brigadier of the Guards.

Reorganisation of the M.I.

Early in April a fresh reorganisation had been made of the mounted infantry. Hitherto this branch of the service had been associated with the cavalry, but now a division of two brigades was created on an independent basis; each brigade consisted of four corps, each of which was made up of one of the original eight battalions of Regular M.I. in addition to battalions of Colonials and Volunteers. Immediately after the relief of Ladysmith Lord Roberts had sent for Ian Hamilton, and, when the new mounted infantry division was formed, gave him the command of it; his two brigadiers were Major-General Hutton and Brigadier-General Ridley. The choice of Hutton to

* At first Hart, with half his brigade, was temporarily employed in the Eastern Free State (see chap. ii., p. 65).

command the 1st M.I. Brigade, which was composed entirely of Canadian and Australian Militia and Volunteers besides the service battalions, was appropriate, for he had not only been the father of the mounted infantry system inaugurated at Aldershot, but had served both in Australia and in Canada as the imperial officer in command of the local troops.* But this distribution was really no more final than the others; the division, which had a strength of 11,000, never existed for any practical purpose, and the object of its organisation as such was never apparent. The brigades were broken up nearly as soon as formed, and the units allotted piecemeal to the various infantry divisions. Ian Hamilton himself, before any important operations took place, was in effect given the command of an infantry division in addition to one of his brigades of mounted infantry and a brigade of cavalry. The infantry division was formed of Smith-Dorrien's 19th Brigade, taken from the Ninth Division, and of the 21st, constituted, at the end of April, of the Camerons, Sussex, Derbys, and C.I.V. infantry under Colonel Bruce Hamilton, who was transferred from the position of Assistant Adjutant-General to General Clery.

The cavalry.

The only change made in the cavalry was the addition in April of a fourth brigade under General Dickson. But from another source there had been a great accession of strength to the mounted troops. During March and April nearly the whole of the new force of 10,000 Imperial Yeomanry had arrived. At first some attempt was made at organising them under one command; General Brabazon was appointed to make all arrangements for their encampment, mounting, and training as they landed; but beyond this it became out of the question to keep them all under one general, since, owing to the dearth of mounted men, the units had to be scattered among the different columns. The arrangement made at the end of April was that General Brabazon should have six battalions with the main army, Lord Erroll four battalions in the Orange Free State, Lord Chesham four at Kimberley, Sir Charles Warren one, and that three should

The Imperial Yeomanry.

* Originally he had been intended to take command of the 20th Brigade, and had actually gone to Kimberley for the purpose.

remain on the lines of communication in Cape Colony. But even this distribution was not adhered to, for, as the Yeomanry and some Colonial corps were the only mounted men available for Hunter's, Methuen's, Warren's, Rundle's, Chermside's, and Kelly-Kenny's forces, almost the whole force was distributed among these generals when the final advance came, while General Brabazon himself was attached to Lord Roberts's staff with no troops to command.

Question between direct advance and deliberate conquest of the country.

In making his plans the most important question which Lord Roberts had been called upon to decide was whether as he advanced he should thoroughly subdue all the territory passed through by his troops or push rapidly into the heart of the enemy's country, leaving perhaps problems behind which would have to be dealt with hereafter. Several of his advisers at the time, and still more of his critics after the event, were of opinion that every inch of the territory passed over should be thoroughly made good before a further step was taken, and that, in view of the long line of communications entailed by a march of three hundred miles, not a Boer in arms should be left behind to interfere with them. There was an ominous precedent against a dash to the capital in Napoleon's advance to Moscow. Might not the rapid advance, now contemplated by Lord Roberts, leave the main forces of the enemy untouched, as happened in the Moscow campaign? and in that case, would the capture of Pretoria have brought the submission of the Boers any nearer? Their love of independence might prove stronger than their sense of loss at the capture of their capital; they might even gather round the victorious army encamped there and reduce it to the state of a beleaguered garrison, or, if it retreated, deal such fatal blows at its line of communications as to reduce it to the plight of Napoleon's grand army.

But Lord Roberts never wavered in his determination to advance directly and rapidly on Pretoria.

But, in spite of some slight confirmation which the events of the last month seemed to give to this pessimistic view, Lord Roberts never wavered from his original determination to make Pretoria the immediate goal of his next advance. It was, indeed, a determination in thorough consonance with his own optimistic temperament.

There is in Lord Roberts's nature an appreciation of

dramatic fitness which has always more or less unconsciously influenced his strategy, and has undoubtedly been a factor in his successful career. His message to the English people after Paardeberg is an example of this, and his rigid observance of all the customary pomp and ceremony whenever he occupied a conquered town is indicative of the same dramatic instinct. He was, therefore, the more inclined to estimate at its full value, as indeed most great commanders have, the influence of sentiment in keeping up the spirit of an army, and of the people behind the army, on whose support and enthusiasm much of the success of war depends. Now from the very beginning of the war there had been a deep-rooted expectation that it would not be long before the British Army planted the Union Jack in Pretoria, the lair of the old Dutch lion Kruger, the centre from which radiated all the anti-English sentiment in South Africa; and that when Pretoria was captured the whole fabric built by Dutch arrogance and ignorance would crumble away. This was believed at home, and with the soldiers of all ranks who landed in South Africa the strength of the belief was almost pathetic.* And it was not merely in England and in the Army that this belief of the importance of Pretoria was held. In foreign countries, such as France, where the capital is even more vital to the nation's existence than it is in England, the Boers would never be regarded as beaten as long as they held their capital, and as long as they were not obviously beaten there was always the chance that some advantage might be taken of England's embarrassments.

Moral consideration in favour of this course. The importance attached to the conquest of Pretoria.

With regard to the effect of his advance on the Boers, Lord Roberts, in common with most observers at the time, fully expected that it would have the effect of drawing them from all parts to withstand him, and that at any rate under the walls of Pretoria, if not sooner, he would be able to

Expected effect of the advance on the Boers.

* Lord Roberts stated in his evidence before the Hospital Commission, referring to the large amount of sickness in the army when it arrived at Kroonstad: "That was really our worst time, because I think many men had come on who probably would have done better to have stayed behind, but they were all so anxious to reach Pretoria, as they thought that that meant the end of the business. A lot of these poor fellows made themselves out to be better than they really were." [Cd. 454, 1901, p. 384.]

Their defeat in the field a secondary consideration.

inflict upon them a decisive defeat. At the same time it must be admitted that the actual defeat of the Boer forces was at this time a secondary consideration with Lord Roberts. In fact, he calculated that the moral consideration which weighed with him would weigh equally in an inverse sense on his opponents, and he was therefore more anxious to reach Pretoria than to fight battles. This was partly due to the strong disinclination to shed the enemy's blood, which was felt not only by Lord Roberts, but almost generally on the English side. The reasons for this disinclination are interesting and creditable; they were partly the belief that the Boers were readier to yield than was really the case, partly the feeling almost of kinship which undoubtedly existed among the combatants of both sides, and partly the recollection that the Boers would have to live with the English hereafter and that a forbearing spirit in carrying on the war would tend to an easier settlement when it was over. These feelings were hardly acknowledged; they were nevertheless underlying, for rarely has a war been carried on with less personal hatred on both sides. But creditable as they were, their existence and the absence of any really crushing blows to the Boers during the war were no doubt a considerable factor in determining the wearisome prolongation of the campaign. Moreover, as has been already shown, the danger from a partial pacification of the Free State was one which Lord Roberts from the very first under-estimated. It may possibly have been due to his almost exclusively Indian experience that he was apt to exaggerate the effect of his victories. He was used to dealing with peoples whose tendency was to see in a brilliant victory, a lightning-like march, or the capture of a town by the enemy, an indication from Heaven that their cause was doomed. The Boers were fatalists too, in a sense, but their fatalism took rather the form of a confidence always bubbling up afresh that they, a chosen people, must win in the end, and that a temporary defeat was only an incident in the long struggle; moreover, being essentially a nation of farmers, they regarded with comparative equanimity the loss of their towns, which were largely the resort of races alien to themselves. Lord Roberts never appreciated this difference,

Absence of any bitter feeling against the Boers.

Danger of partial pacification under-estimated by Lord Roberts.

and he was often inclined to think that it would be enough to display his great armies marching through the Boers' country, to capture their towns, and to push them aside in order to bring them to their knees.

In addition to these moral considerations, which caused Lord Roberts to decide on a direct advance to Pretoria, others of a more immediately practical nature influenced him no less. In the first place, as long as the Boers held Pretoria and the line to Delagoa Bay they had means of obtaining reinforcements and supplies from Europe, and in the railway workshops a factory for guns; and as long as they held Johannesburg, which must fall with Pretoria, they had factories for making ammunition, and mines from which they could extract the gold to pay for the continuation of the war. Secondly, there was a danger that if the British occupation of Johannesburg were too long delayed, the disorderly elements in the population might get out of hand and wreck the mines, involving a loss of millions to British subjects and neutrals.

More practical reasons for advancing on Pretoria.

Lastly, even if Lord Roberts had foreseen that the mere occupation of Johannesburg and Pretoria was to have no appreciable effect on the conclusion of the war, and that a guerilla campaign was likely to ensue, he would still, no doubt, have felt that a direct advance on Pretoria was the best policy. It was always part of his scheme to secure the railway as he advanced. In case, after the occupation of Pretoria, the war continued, the possession of an uninterrupted line of 1,000 miles from Cape Town into the heart of the Transvaal would be the chief advantage derived from such an advance, and the best means for dealing with a prolonged resistance. For the railway formed the backbone of the country, and if this were securely held, it would then be merely a matter of time for expeditions drawing their support from it to hunt down the enemy in outlying parts of the country. On the other hand, any elaborate attempt to make good every step of the country on each side before the main army reached Pretoria would be waste of time. If Lord Roberts had tried to make his occupation of the Free State effective, and to catch every

Importance of securing the railway, in case the war were prolonged after the capture of Pretoria.

roving band of the enemy as he advanced, the only result would probably have been to drive them into the security of the Transvaal, whence they could sally forth whenever a tempting chance of a raid on his communications occurred.

No need for another flank movement.

In spite of the risks, therefore, which have been pointed out, it would seem that the preponderating balance of advantage lay with Lord Roberts's choice to make a rapid advance on Pretoria. For the last reason, also, there was no question as to the method of advance. A repetition on a larger scale of the flank movement which was so successful in the advance on Bloemfontein was obviously now unnecessary. Lord Roberts had now regained the tactical superiority over his opponents which had been lost at the beginning of the war, for his numbers far exceeded theirs, and he had discovered that, given superior numbers, he could always drive the Boers out of any position if he extended his line sufficiently to threaten their flanks. There was, therefore, no longer any reason against taking the shortest and most direct route for his main advance, which likewise gave him the immeasurable advantage of at the same time making good his communications.

Scheme was a convergent advance of many columns.

But though the main army was to advance along the railway, it would be a great mistake to imagine that as an isolated movement by itself. The essence of Lord Roberts's great plan lay in this, that it was to be a convergent advance of several columns along an enormous front of 500 miles; and it is important, in order to gain a clear idea of his strategy, to remember that all the troops not actually employed in guarding communications were used in the movement. In one respect only had he been obliged to modify his original conception of the way in which his columns should co-operate. Immediately after the relief of Ladysmith he had seen that the Boers would concentrate most of their forces against an advance in the Free State, since a comparatively small body would suffice to delay Buller in the difficult country of Northern Natal. He was therefore anxious that Sir Redvers should leave only a containing force opposite the Biggarsberg, and then swing

Failure of Buller to co-operate as effectively as required.

round with the rest of his troops through Van Reenen's Pass to Harrismith. The advantage to be expected from this manœuvre was that from Harrismith Buller's advance over the level plains of the northern Free State would be comparatively rapid. He would then be in a position to co-operate effectively with the Field-Marshal either by converging on Kroonstad or by cutting off the Boer retreat on the Delagoa Bay line east of Pretoria. Unfortunately, he made so many difficulties about leaving Natal that Roberts abandoned the idea. It is a great pity that he did not insist on his own view; but throughout the campaign he showed a considerable hesitation in giving direct orders to Buller, partly, no doubt, because he felt that Buller should be best able to appreciate the difficulties in Natal, and partly from a chivalrous disinclination to treat a general who had once been commander-in-chief in South Africa in the same way as he treated his other subordinates. That this hesitation was misplaced there can be no doubt, even though the alternative involved may have been Sir Redvers's supersession by a more enterprising commander. The final result was that when the advance began on May 3, Buller, who had done nothing for over two months, co-operated no further than by engaging the attention of the Boers on the Biggarsberg.*

Roberts's scheme compared to Kitchener's subsequent drives.

But though in this respect Lord Roberts failed to carry out the whole of his plan, the essential feature of a joint action by converging columns was always uppermost in his mind. Indeed, the advance may best be described as a sweep up, or even as the precursor of those drives which were inaugurated later by Lord Kitchener. The object in the two cases was not, it is true, quite the same, as Kitchener aimed at catching all the Boers within the area of his drives, while Roberts merely wished to prevent their doubling back on his communications. Since, therefore, Lord Roberts expected most of the Boers to oppose his own advance, he could afford in places to leave the meshes of his net very wide. Nevertheless, every point was carefully thought out, the

* For a more detailed account of the exchange of communications between Roberts and Buller from February to May, see chap. v., pp. 166–8.

starting-place of each column was definitely laid down, and plenty of scope was left for modifications in the original plan, to meet the enemy's tactics as the advance proceeded. Thus again the long delay at Bloemfontein proved not altogether unfortunate, since it gave Lord Roberts time to form a better idea of the nature of the country before him, and of the points where he would probably meet with the most opposition, and some of the combinations which he had arranged for a month previously were sensibly modified for the better, owing to the experience he acquired during April.

In accordance with the Field-Marshal's final scheme, all the columns taking part in the advance were to start from points on an almost level line extending from Kimberley to Ladysmith. From Kimberley, on the left flank, Hunter was to march with his 10,000 men and 18 guns * through Fourteen Streams into the Transvaal from the west, while Methuen with 10,000 more and 26 guns was to move straight up through Boshof and Hoopstad to be ready either to cross the Vaal and support Hunter's turning operation or to come in closer to Lord Roberts on the main line. On the extreme right flank in Natal was General Buller with an army which still, in spite of the loss of General Hunter's division and the Imperial Light Horse, was the largest under one command in South Africa, amounting as it did to 45,000 men with 119 guns. To him, as we have seen, was assigned the duty of clearing Natal, though Lord Roberts still cherished the hope that perhaps at a later stage he might be able to assist him by a diversion over another of the westerly passes of the Drakensberg, instead of forcing his way through the difficult pass of Laing's Nek.

Left flank advance, Hunter and Methuen.

Right flank Buller.

The central column under Lord Roberts.

The central column, which was to march straight up the railway under Lord Roberts's more immediate command, consisted at first of two infantry divisions and four corps of mounted infantry, but had no cavalry, as French had not been recalled in time from the neighbourhood of Thaba 'Nchu with his three brigades. Of these two infantry divisions

* In this *résumé* of the various forces no account is taken of pom-poms or Maxims.

the Seventh, under General Tucker, consisted of the 14th (Maxwell) and 15th (Wavell) Brigades, and attached to it were a company of the C.I.V.M.I. and Nesbitt's Horse, the 18th, 62nd, and 75th Batteries, and the 26th Company R.E.; the Eleventh, under General Pole-Carew,* was composed of the Guards (Inigo Jones) and 18th (Stephenson) Brigades, with the 83rd, 84th, and 85th Batteries, two naval 4·7 guns, two naval 12-pounders, and two 5-inch siege guns, the 12th Company R.E., and a small mounted force under Major Pilkington, consisting of the 2nd West Australian M.I. and Struben's Scouts.† General Hutton had the 1st (Alderson) and 3rd (Pilcher) M.I. Corps, the New South Wales Mounted Regiment from De Lisle's Corps, "G" Battery, two pom-poms, and eighteen machine guns. Under Colonel Henry were detached his own (4th) M.I. Corps and Ross's 8th.

The immediate left flank of the central column was sufficiently protected by Methuen's and Hunter's divisions, but there was a considerable gap on the right flank between Lord Roberts and Buller. And this right flank was especially exposed to attack. The commandos here under de Wet, Lemmer, Grobler and Olivier, had during the last month shown their capacity for rapid surprises and vigorous offensive; they had escaped all attempts to hem them in, and they were now at large with practically undiminished numbers, only forty miles to the east of Bloemfontein, where the character of the country suited their methods of warfare. Lord Roberts still somewhat under-estimated the energy of these Free State Boers and of their commanders, regarding them as already demoralised. But he very wisely determined to take no risks. Accordingly he detached for the protection of his right flank a strong column to march in a parallel line to the main army between twenty and forty miles away to the east.

Dangerous gap between Roberts and Buller

* Pole-Carew's division was recalled from the pursuit of the Dewetsdorp Boers on April 26, and arrived in Bloemfontein in time to refit.

† This force under Major Pilkington's command was supplemented at Brandfort by a contingent of Prince Alfred's Guard (Port Elizabeth volunteers).

filled by the "Winburg" column under Ian Hamilton.

The command of this right flank, or Winburg column as it was called, was assigned to Major-General Ian Hamilton. He was already at the right distance east at Thaba 'Nchu, where he had the 2nd (De Lisle), 5th (Dawson), 6th (Legge), and 7th (Bainbridge) M.I. Corps, all under Brigadier-General Ridley, and Major-General Smith-Dorrien's infantry brigade (19th); the column was to be made up to a total of about 14,000 men by the addition of Major-General Broadwood's cavalry brigade (2nd) and of the recently formed 21st Brigade under Major-General Bruce Hamilton, which at the end of April was posted to the north of Bloemfontein.

Sketch of Ian Hamilton.

The choice of so young a general as Ian Hamilton, who was then only forty-seven and had come out to South Africa as a colonel, to command that part of the main army which entailed most responsibility and independence, was a good instance of Lord Roberts's judgment of character and determination to give full scope to dash and enterprise. Ian Hamilton was one of those men who had come to the front from his own determination to be there when important work was toward. He had proved himself in India a capable organiser as well as a dashing soldier, had been wounded at Majuba, and had seen campaigns in Afghanistan, Egypt, Burmah, Chitral, and Tirah. His record in Natal has been set forth in previous volumes, and Lord Roberts, who had first recognised his ability as a member of his staff in India, had sent for him immediately after the relief of Ladysmith. There were perhaps some more scientific soldiers in the British army than Ian Hamilton, and some who made fewer mistakes, but he had two great merits which Lord Roberts himself also possessed and could appreciate in others: an eye for country which amounted almost to genius, and a capacity for pushing on and imposing his will on the enemy instead of waiting for them to develop their plans. Also he was willing to take responsibility, run risks, and stake a budding reputation on the venture, a quality too rarely found among officers, or for the matter of that among men of any profession. Though personally ambitious, he was always ready to recognise merit in his colleagues, and like many of the good soldiers whose adventures are recorded by Dumas,

LIEUT.-GENERAL IAN HAMILTON, C.B., D.S.O.
COMMANDING MOUNTED INFANTRY DIVISION.
Photo by Duffus Bros., Cape Town.

fighting and adventure were his favourite interest and his favourite theme.

Colvile in support of Hamilton.

A less defensible arrangement than the appointment of Ian Hamilton to command the Winburg column was that by which he was to be supported during the early part of the march by General Colvile, his senior in rank. General Colvile, it will be remembered, had already on April 25 given up the 19th Brigade from his division to Ian Hamilton,* and his command was now reduced to the Highland Brigade,† a squadron of the Eastern Province Horse, two 4·7 guns, the 82nd Battery, and the 7th Company R.E. The orders which he received from Lord Roberts were to follow Ian Hamilton's column, remaining some five or ten miles in rear of it, so as to be available on either flank if required. The disadvantage of placing a senior general in such a position that he became dependent on the actions of his junior is obvious, and the reason of such an arrangement has never been explained. ‡

Roberts advances with 100,000 men.

At the start from Bloemfontein in the beginning of May the numbers of Lord Roberts's army, including the central column and Ian Hamilton's, may be put down as 38,000 men; § Colvile's, Buller's, Methuen's, and Hunter's columns brought up the total for the converging columns in the first line of march to over 100,000.

* See chap. ii., p. 73. The transfer was made permanent on May 2. In the field Hamilton usually gave Major-General Smith-Dorrien the command of his infantry division, consisting of the 19th and 21st Brigades, Colonel Spens being given the command of the 19th Brigade.

† On May 1, the Highland Light Infantry, which had been detached from the Highland Brigade since the middle of February, rejoined from Chermside's division.

‡ When General Colvile's division was broken up it would have been better not to keep him in such a position as to necessitate his actions being subordinated to those of his junior. For, if anything had gone wrong, General Colvile, being the senior officer, would undoubtedly have had to bear the responsibility, and yet at the same time he had to conform to his junior's dispositions. A suitable arrangement would have been to have left Major-General Macdonald to command his own brigade, and to have utilised General Colvile's services elsewhere in the seat of war.

§ In this total French's cavalry is included for convenience, although, as a matter of fact, they did not join the main army till some days after the advance began. See chap. iv., pp. 111, 112

Other co-operating columns.

Besides these 100,000 men there were more than half as many again left at various points to secure the country behind the first line and on its flanks, or as a reserve.

In the first place, there were several columns whose duties were of an active nature. Of these the principal was

Rundle.

on the right flank, consisting of Rundle's division and the Colonial division. Their function was to move up the Eastern Free State after the main army had gone forward, pushing a barrier further and further north against any outbreak of the Boers towards Lord Roberts's rear. West of

Warren.

Hunter, Sir Charles Warren served to keep the Kimberley-

Plumer.

Mafeking line from attack. Plumer continued to keep open the communications from Buluwayo almost as far as Mafeking, where Baden-Powell was still holding out; and, since the general advance, which Lord Roberts hoped would have relieved Mafeking automatically, had been so long delayed,

Mahon.

a flying column was organised under Colonel Mahon to move up from Kimberley for this purpose. There was also a

Carrington.

force under General Carrington using Beira as a base, which was expected to co-operate from the north by moving on Pietersburg. At one time, too, there was some idea of

Raid through Swaziland.

making a raid through Swaziland on the Komati Poort railway; a detachment of Strathcona's Horse were actually sent up under the escort of some warships to Kosi Bay for the purpose, but on arrival it was discovered that the plan, which had been talked about for some months in the cafés of Lourenço Marques, had become known to the Boers, and the expedition was recalled.

In the second place there were the more stationary troops, whose duty it was to hold the lines of communication. Chief

Kelly-Kenny.

of these was Kelly-Kenny's Division left at Bloemfontein. Lord Roberts showed his wisdom in leaving a general of such experience here, for, though at first sight he seemed wasted, there was always the chance that the Free State might be cut off from the main army, and in such a crisis it was of the utmost importance to have a man who could assume supreme command unquestionably. Behind Kelly-

Chermside.

Kenny was Chermside's Third Division, which was to hold the line from Norval's Pont and Bethulie to Bloemfontein,

besides Fauresmith and Phillipolis west of the line, and Reddersburg and Dewetsdorp east. Cape Colony, where the rebellion seemed to be finally suppressed, was left under General Forestier-Walker, commanding lines of communication at Cape Town, with General Settle as his inspector of communications. Twenty-three Militia battalions were absorbed in the duty of holding the railway from Cape Town to Kimberley, from Port Elizabeth to Norval's Pont, and from East London to Bethulie, and these were reinforced by various Volunteer regiments of Cape Colonials.*

Forestier-Walker.

Lord Roberts was the first to recognise that of this great force the battalion on lines of communication furthest away from the front was as indispensable a part of his great scheme as the cavalry screen in the forefront of danger; but he also recognised that, human nature being what it is, the soldier does not appreciate this. From all ranks of society and from all parts of the Empire the best men had pushed forward to take a share in the work of the Empire; it was but just that when the need had been so great and the answer so prompt, none should go back thinking that they were not welcomed and that the sacrifice they made was useless. Lord Roberts, standing for the mother country, was determined that the reproach of ungraciousness or ingratitude should not be brought against her, and he rightly thought that the warmest welcome he could give to the Volunteers of the Empire was to give them a place in the vanguard of his great advance, so that all should feel that they had shared and helped to form another of the glorious traditions of the British Army. Without the troops under Hunter, Methuen, Rundle, Buller, Kelly-Kenny, Chermside, Forestier-Walker, and Warren, success would have been impossible, but the men whom the Field-Marshal meant to lead first into Johannesburg and Pretoria were those of his own central column and of Ian Hamilton's. Here, then, was the

Composition of the central army thoroughly representative of the Empire.

* The War Office claimed that there were about 210,000 troops in the country at the time; this probably included all who had been sent out or enlisted in South Africa, and does not take into account the wastage which had then occurred. Probably there were not more than about 170,000 troops in the field at this time, making this the grand total under Lord Roberts's command when his advance began.

place of honour in the soldier's eye, and here Lord Roberts took care to have every part of the Empire and almost every branch of the service represented. To the backbone of infantry, composed of Guards, battalions from the North Country, the East Coast, the South, and the Midlands of England, from Wales, and from the Highlands and Lowlands of Scotland, he added the battalion of Militia from Canada and London's picked Volunteers. The New South Wales Lancers and the Australian Horse shared in the dangers of the cavalry, where Ireland, unrepresented in the infantry, found her place. In the mounted infantry the Regular companies, drawn from English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish regiments, were brigaded with representatives from Canada, New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, West Australia, and Tasmania, from New Zealand, from South Africa, from India, Burma, and Ceylon; three companies of the Imperial Yeomanry and a company of the City Imperial Mounted Volunteers were attached to headquarters. The Navy also sent guns with their complement of blue-jackets to take their place in the advance. The only arm of the service not represented in the central army, except on Lord Roberts's own staff, was the Militia of the United Kingdom, though even that arm was represented on Methuen's subsidiary column, which reached the Vaal before Lord Roberts himself.

Lord Roberts the directing brain.

The brain of this large force was Lord Roberts. Now more than ever, in spite of the constantly increasing area of the operations, Lord Roberts held a very tight hand not only on the general scheme of the other columns, but also, to a large extent, on their detailed movements. The only important exception to this statement is that, though he insisted on being informed of Buller's operations, yet, for the reasons already set forth, he allowed him an almost entirely free hand in deciding on his course of action. From the other generals, especially such as Ian Hamilton, Rundle, Hunter, and Methuen, who were co-operating with his movement, he exacted full reports of their progress, and as long as communications rendered it possible, kept them instructed as to his intentions. Moreover, though he never

lost sight of the fact that he was Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, responsible as such for the strategical dispositions of an army of 170,000 men in a country stretching for 1,600 miles from Beira to Table Bay, he also kept entirely in his own hands the tactical direction of the central column, which he himself accompanied along the railway.

Bad staff arrangements.

But for the proper execution of a homogeneous plan involving the harmonious action of so many columns operating in so vast a country, concentration of system and co-ordination were essential. Unfortunately, the mere machinery for communicating Lord Roberts's desires was one of the most defective instruments at his disposal. Lord Roberts had a large staff* accompanying him, composed partly of some of the best men in the Army, such as Lord Kitchener and Sir William Nicholson, partly of officers put on chiefly in compliment to the various corps they represented, and partly of pleasant aristocrats who acted in the position of aides-de-camp. The good men no doubt were in all the posts of real importance, and if there had been any proper organisation of staff duties the work could not have been put into better hands. But as has already been pointed out in a previous volume,† there was no system at all; Lord Kitchener was nominally Chief of the Staff, and his duty should have been to keep in touch with all the various heads of department, such as the deputy adjutant-general, the directors of transport, of intelligence, and of railways, and to work out all the details of Lord Roberts's schemes; in reality he was employed as a sort of second in command, sent off to press forward an operation which seemed to hang fire, or take charge of a small collection of columns. Even when he was present at his post Lord Roberts did not necessarily transmit his orders through him, but through any secretary, deputy assistant adjutant-general, or even aide-de-camp who happened to be present. Then Lord Kitchener, in ignorance of what had been done, would sometimes, as Chief of the Staff, transmit other orders not in

* There were, including the necessary heads of department, over seventy members of the Headquarters Staff.

† See vol. iii., pp. 336 *sqq.*

harmony with the Commander-in-Chief's; or movements of troops would be ordered and no directions given about transport. From this bad system mistakes and even minor disasters arose, the bearing of which will be discussed in their place. Yet, on the whole, it is surprising how small the confusion was on important points. That this was so was due chiefly to Lord Roberts's own extraordinary energy and memory. All through the march he kept up a constant flow of orders and telegrams, never flurried, rarely forgetting a point, and alive to all considerations, whether political or military; and certainly his own personality was some remedy for the defective staff arrangements, which are excusable from the difficulty at such a time of creating a system such as did not previously exist.

Dispositions and numbers of the Boers.

Such was the force and such the means which Lord Roberts had at his disposal for his march to Pretoria. Opposed to him the Boers actually in the field can hardly have amounted to more than 30,000, taking the extreme estimates made, though there was a considerable reserve to draw upon of men taking a holiday on their farms. Of this total of 30,000, about half were either ready or on their way to oppose Lord Roberts's main advance. At Brandfort Generals De la Rey and Smuts had 2,000 men, made up of 500 from the Heidelberg commando, 800 from Wakkerstroom, 600 from Ermelo, and 100 of Blake's Irish Brigade, with three Creusot guns and two pom-poms. South-east of Brandfort, in the tangle of hills between the railway and Thaba 'Nchu, Generals Philip Botha and Kolbe had been sent with between 2,000 and 3,000 men, 1 Krupp, and 1 pom-pom to guard the way to Winburg and keep open the communications with the Free State commandos; and Grobler acted as a reserve to this force, with 1,500, at a point on the Vet River north of Houtnek, whither he had retired after his fight with Ian Hamilton at Israel's Poort. Round Thaba 'Nchu de Wet, Olivier, and Lemmer still had the bulk of the Free State forces, amounting to about 6,000 men.

In addition, 3,000 men were then on their way round from Natal under the command of Louis Botha himself. Of the remaining 15,000, there were 8,000 Transvaalers on the

Biggarsberg under Lukas Meyer and 1,500 Free Staters under Prinsloo at Van Reenen's Pass, while on the west Snyman and du Plessis were still in the neighbourhood of Mafeking with 2,000 men, 1,200 were in Griqualand West, and Du Toit and Andries Cronje were guarding the crossing of the Vaal at Fourteen Streams with another 2,000.

Disproportion of numbers :— 30,000 Boers to 100,000 English.

At first sight the numbers on the two sides seem very disproportionate, since on the English side the main army and Buller's, Methuen's, and Hunter's columns alone numbered over 100,000 against the 30,000 of the Boers. But it must be remembered that the Boers always had a great many more men available than were actually in the field at any one time. Secondly, as they could count on the whole country as their base of supply, they could go almost anywhere in safety, could get food wherever they chose, and were not obliged to waste men in guarding communications. Lord Roberts, on the other hand, could not call an inch of ground which his troops were not actually occupying his own, and he had to be prepared to fight his enemy wherever they elected to make a stand.

Boers' want of plan.

The real weakness of the Boers was that they had no definite plan. They had vague ideas of opposing the advance at selected positions, but these ideas came to very little. The English had started the war aimlessly and without a well-considered plan, the Boers had been ready, and had at one time had all the cards in their hands. Now the positions were reversed; the English had a great organiser of victory at their head, who knew very definitely what he wanted and would never be turned aside from it by side issues; the Boers had nothing on which to rely but an almost unreasoning and obstinate patriotism; the result was long in coming, but it was eventually the triumph of Roberts, and after him of Kitchener, of the men with a definite plan to secure a definite object, against the men with forlorn expedients for snatching at a victory already out of their grasp.

CHAPTER IV

THE ADVANCE OF THE MAIN ARMY TO PRETORIA

I

Preliminary movements to be made by Tucker and Ian Hamilton on 30th April, 1900.

BEFORE the central column started towards Pretoria, a few preliminary manœuvres were necessary at the end of April in order to bring the whole of the main army into line. Ian Hamilton was too far south at Thaba 'Nchu, and two of the brigades allotted to him, Broadwood's and Bruce Hamilton's, were still with Tucker in the neighbourhood of Krantz Kraal. At the same time Lord Roberts wished to keep open his communications with Ian Hamilton by clearing the Boers from the hills south-east of Karee Siding. Orders were accordingly issued for the first moves to be made on April 30 by Ian Hamilton and Tucker. Ian Hamilton was to move north from Thaba 'Nchu past Houtnek, halt at Jacobsrust for Bruce Hamilton and Broadwood to join him, and make his way to Winburg by the 3rd. Lord Roberts seems to have issued these orders in ignorance of the fact that Philip Botha had massed most of his men at Houtnek, as he informed Ian Hamilton that he would reach Jacobsrust without much opposition. Tucker, on the same day, was to clear the ridges north of Krantzkraal between Glen Siding and Houtnek, and help Bruce Hamilton and Broadwood on their way to join Ian Hamilton.

Ian Hamilton starts towards Jacobsrust.

Early on the morning of the 30th April Ian Hamilton started out from Thaba 'Nchu with his mounted infantry brigade,* Smith-Dorrien's brigade, "P" Battery and the 74th

* Brigadier-General Ridley was on the sick list from April 29th till May 30th, so Colonel Dawson (5th M.I. Corps) commanded the brigade during that period, leaving Major Lean in temporary charge of his corps.

Battery, which he had borrowed from General Rundle.* This force was none too large for the advance through Houtnek. For ten miles the road north of Thaba 'Nchu is flanked on the east by a line of ridges; these ridges then curve round westward and end abruptly in the imposing mass of Toba Mountain. One road passes over the ridges where they join the mountain, another a little further east at Houtnek. Botha had a gun and a pom-pom concealed in the pass where the more westerly road crosses the ridges, and two more guns further east; most of his men were placed in this pass and on each side of Houtnek, but the ridges almost as far south as Thaba 'Nchu were also held. On Toba itself there were at first only a few of the foreign legion under Commandant Blignaut.

Philip Botha's dispositions at Houtnek and Toba Mountain.

Ian Hamilton's column, with its long line of transport, was allowed to proceed without much molestation until about 9 o'clock the mounted infantry of the advance and right flank guard had crossed the Koranna Spruit seven miles from Thaba 'Nchu. They were then brought to a standstill by an outburst of rifle fire. The General was some way behind, but the corps commanders of the mounted infantry rapidly made their dispositions. Bainbridge wheeled his corps to the right to hold the Boers on the eastern ridges, De Lisle galloped up with his corps and "P" Battery to a ridge about 2,000 yards south of the pass, while Legge took ground on the left with his own corps and the 5th in support, sending Kitchener's Horse forward to attack Toba Mountain. About 10.30 the infantry and the 74th Battery arrived, and the convoy was outspanned and parked just north of Koranna Spruit, under cover of Bainbridge's mounted infantry.

Hamilton's column held up. First proceedings of the M.I.

To Ian Hamilton it soon appeared that the approach to the pass was too exposed for a frontal attack, and that the eastern ridges were unpromising for a turning movement, whereas Toba Mountain commanded the road and seemed

Ian Hamilton decides to attack Toba Mountain.

* Ian Hamilton was never able to return this battery to Rundle, so Rundle's brigade division of the 74th, 77th and 79th Batteries, under Colonel Pratt, was broken up and Rundle received the 2nd Battery in exchange.

to be lightly held. Accordingly he sent the Gordons, under Colonel Macbean, and two companies of the Shropshires to reinforce Kitchener's Horse on the mountain. At the same time he kept the rest of the Shropshires, with part of De Lisle's corps and his two batteries, on the ridge facing the pass, so as to occupy the enemy in front; the rest of De Lisle's corps was spread out on his right flank towards Houtnek. The Canadian Regiment were held in reserve, and the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry were left as guard to the transport.

Attack on Toba Mountain checked.

The infantry and Kitchener's Horse found no great difficulty in clearing the lower slopes of the mountain. But when they tried to advance from the first plateau to the crests rising out of it they could make no headway against the well-aimed fire of the defenders, securely posted behind the natural cover of the rocks. The Boers had the further advantage that their guns in the pass were able to sweep the south-eastern approach to the mountain by which reinforcements from the Canadian Regiment were sent up during the day.

Gallantry of small detachment under Captain Towse.

During a lull in the attack a counter-attack was, however, most successfully repelled by Captain Towse and a small detachment of the Gordons and Kitchener's Horse, numbering thirteen in all, who were somewhat in advance of the rest of their comrades. About 150 foreigners of Blignaut's command, under Colonel Maximoff, a Russian, were sent from the pass to reinforce their friends holding the crests. As they came over the plateau they saw Captain Towse's party and bore down upon them with the intention of surrounding them. The whole movement was visible from the English position in the plain below, but the foreigners advanced so steadily and in such good alignment that they were taken to be a party of British soldiers. Captain Towse, who was moving forward at the time, did not see them till they were within hailing distance, when Maximoff called upon him to surrender. Hastily getting his men under cover of some stones, Captain Towse answered by a volley at point-blank range; at this point the English gunners below realised the position. Luckily they had the range, and were able to help Captain Towse's little band by pouring shrapnel into Colonel

Maximoff's ranks. The party of thirteen held their ground, answering volley for volley, and though seven of them were killed or wounded, with the assistance of the guns they drove their assailants off into the cover of the rocks behind. Maximoff was wounded by a shot from Captain Towse, but Captain Towse himself paid dearly for his gallantry and for the V.C., which rewarded it, by a bullet which took away the sight of both his eyes.*

By the evening of April 30 Ian Hamilton has gained nothing.

It was indeed fortunate that the Boers made no more serious counter-attack than Maximoff's: on this as on many similar occasions they seemed to lack the necessary initiative or readiness to turn to advantage the superior tactical position in which they were placed. For at night-time they still held the crest of Toba Mountain, their centre and left flank was as forbidding as ever, and they had even worked round so as to threaten the right rear of the British column. Under these circumstances Ian Hamilton thought it advisable to ask General French for assistance to enable him to push forward in time, and he kept all his troops in the positions they had gained during the day.

French sends reinforcements

General French, who was at Thaba 'Nchu, received the request by telegram at 8 P.M., and at once directed the 4th (Dickson's) Cavalry Brigade, accompanied by "O" Battery R.H.A., to support General Hamilton next morning. The 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment, with the 2nd Field Battery R.A. from Rundle's division, were also directed to march from Thaba 'Nchu as early as possible on the morning of May 1, and assist in the attack on Houtnek; while General Gordon, who was with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade at Israel's Poort, was to send two squadrons with two guns of "R" Battery R.H.A. to threaten the south and south-west of Toba Mountain.

which arrive on May 1.

By 9 o'clock on the morning of May 1 these reinforcements had arrived and afforded sensible relief to Ian Hamilton. By the arrival of the East Yorks Bainbridge's M.I., who were holding the right rear, were set free to advance against the Boer left; the 8th Hussars, in co-operation with two squadrons of Lancers from the 3rd Brigade,

* See vol. ii., p. 412.

were sent on a turning movement round Toba; and the rest of General Dickson's brigade were kept in the rear at Bultfontein Hill.

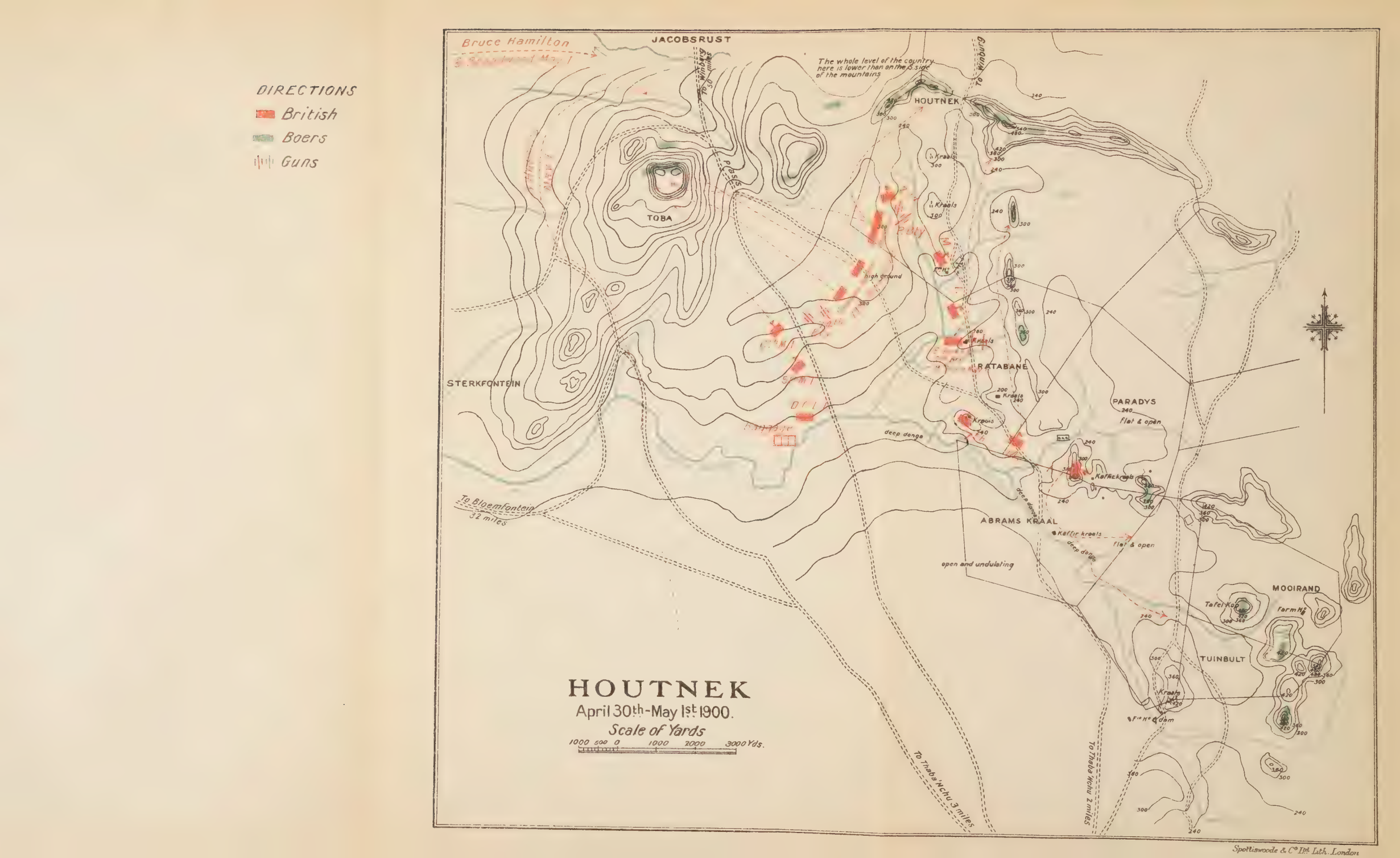
The Boers retreat and leave the way open to Ian Hamilton.

Meanwhile the Boers, during the night, in accordance with their peculiar and fatal custom, had retired to their laager behind the pass instead of strengthening their positions. Many of them, indeed, returned to their posts of the day before to act as a rearguard; for they had already determined on retreat, and early in the morning had begun sending away their convoy. But the small detachment holding Toba Mountain was so much diminished that, although they made a good fight of it, their hold on the mountain was considerably weakened. Finally, General Smith-Dorrien, who had arrived to assume personal command on Toba, ordered a general advance of the Gordons, Canadians, and the two companies of the Shropshires, who cleared the mountain by 1 P.M., just as the 8th Hussars came to view on the northern side. At the same time the Boers in the centre and eastern positions, who had been giving plenty of work to the East Yorks, the M.I. and the rest of the Shropshires, now also began to follow up their convoy. The Shropshires had been gradually making their way to Houtnek, and by 3.30 Ian Hamilton's transport, preceded by the M.I. and guarded by the Shropshires, the Gordons, and the guns, was on its way over the mountains to Jacobsrust, where they were met by Colonel Clowes, who had taken the 8th Hussars completely round Toba Mountain.*

The departure of the Boers from Houtnek on May 1 was hastened no doubt by this cavalry manœuvre round Toba, but it was precipitated by the sudden appearance on their right flank of Broadwood and Bruce Hamilton, who were visible to Smith-Dorrien only five miles off when he reached the top of Toba Mountain. On the previous day these two brigades had taken part in some indeterminate operations north-east of Bloemfontein. The troops engaged were the 4th (Henry) and 8th (Ross) M.I. Corps, stationed at Karee Kloof; Bruce Hamilton's brigade, stationed at Klein Os Spruit; Maxwell's brigade, at Krantz Kraal; and

Operations of various columns near Krantz Kraal, April 30.

* Ian Hamilton's casualties on these two days' fighting were 103, of whom 43 were in the infantry. The losses of the Boers were very small.


DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
Guns
Bruce Hamilton
JACOBSRUST
To Winburg 30 miles
The whole level of the country here is lower than on the S. side of the mountains
HOUTNEK
To Winburg
TOBA
high ground
STERKFONTEIN
RATABANE
PARADYS
Flat & open
deep donga
Kaffir kraals
ABRAMS KRAAL
Kaffir kraals
Flat & open
deep donga
open and undulating
MOOIRAND
Tafel Kop
Farm Hse
TUINBULT
Farm Hse & dam
To Bloemfontein 32 miles
To Thaba 'Nchu 3 miles
To Thaba 'Nchu 2 miles
HOUTNEK
April 30th-May 1st 1900.
Scale of Yards
1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000 Yds.
Spottiswoode & Co Ltd Lith. London

Broadwood's brigade, which had joined Maxwell on the night of the 29th April. The object of the movement was partly to help Broadwood and Bruce Hamilton on their way to join Ian Hamilton, partly to clear the communications between Brandfort and Houtnek, and partly to ascertain the Boer strength in the kopjes east of Brandfort. General Tucker, at Karee Kloof, was the senior officer, but orders seemed to have been given to the various commanders to act independently, so that the only force over which he had actual control was the mounted infantry. A considerable amount of confusion was the result. The mounted infantry started off in a north-east direction towards De la Rey's laager, Tucker's idea being that they would be supported by Bruce Hamilton moving in the same direction, while Maxwell and Broadwood prolonged the line on the south-east. Bruce Hamilton, however, interpreted his orders from headquarters differently, and, instead of moving north-east, contented himself with moving east and occupying a kopje on the way to Jacobsrust. The consequence was that the mounted infantry, being unsupported by infantry, found themselves hard pressed when they had succeeded in drawing out about 1,500 of De la Rey's men with guns, and were forced to retire with some casualties. A detached party of fourteen of Lumsden's Horse under Lieutenant Crane, whom the order for retirement did not reach, were cut off and captured after a gallant fight, in which they lost two-thirds of their number. The cavalry on the right flank also, not receiving the co-operation they expected from Maxwell's brigade, lost some men and found themselves isolated by the evening. Maxwell's brigade, moving nearly due north, occupied the kopje which Bruce Hamilton had seized in the morning, and was there in position for the advance.

Criticism of the Krantz Kraal operations.

These manœuvres, which bore very much the resemblance of being mere parade movements, accompanied, it is true, in the case of the mounted infantry and the cavalry with some casualties, might well have been more fruitful if Tucker had been given supreme command of the operations and been allowed to support his M.I. with a sufficient force of infantry.

As a result of the whole proceedings, the Boers were very little inconvenienced, but the 14th Brigade were enabled to occupy an advanced position towards Vlakfontein, a ridge on the Os Spruit about twelve miles due east of Karee Siding, and on the following day Broadwood and Bruce Hamilton, together with the 76th and 81st Field Batteries and two 5-inch guns under Captain R. H. Massie,* were enabled to march to Jacobsrust without molestation. Here on the evening of May 1 the whole of the Winburg column was concentrated. On May 2 Ian Hamilton halted and was joined by Colvile, who had left the waterworks on April 30 and Waterval on the morning of May 2.

Though Bruce Hamilton and Broadwood are enabled to join Ian Hamilton at Jacobsrust on May 1. Colvile also comes up, May 2.

May 3, 1900. Lord Roberts's main advance begins.

May 2 had been originally fixed for the advance of Lord Roberts's central column, but owing to an unavoidable delay in the arrival of the Eleventh Division at Karee Siding, whence it was to start, the date was changed to May 3. At 5 A.M. on that day Lord Roberts left Bloemfontein with the headquarters staff and went by train to Karee Siding to assume direct command of his army. The different units of the main and Winburg columns had received their orders before, and everything was ready for the start when the Commander-in-Chief arrived.

Scheme for the first day.

On the first day the objective for the central column was Brandfort. Hutton, who had arrived at Kalkpan on the previous night with his two M.I. corps, was to start at daybreak, work round the west of Brandfort and cut the railway north of it. Pole-Carew, preceded by Pilkington's mounted detachment and accompanied by the heavy artillery, and Tucker, with the 15th Brigade and preceded by Reid's company of C.I.V.M.I. and Nesbitt's Horse, were to march left and right of the railway respectively. East of Tucker, Henry's two corps of M.I. were to clear the way for Maxwell's brigade. The Winburg column was to reach Isabellafontein on the Winburg road.

De la Rey's dispositions at Brandfort.

The Boers in Brandfort had received so many false alarms about Lord Roberts's advance during the last two months that the reality came as a surprise to them; and the report that

* These two guns were detached from No. 36 Co. R.G.A., the other two being attached to the Eleventh Division under Major R. G. Foster.

LIEUT.-GENERAL C. TUCKER, C.B.,
COMMANDING 7TH DIVISION.
Photo by Raja, Deen, Dayal & Sons, Bombay.

LIEUT.-GENERAL R. POLE-CAREW, C.B.,
COMMANDING 11TH DIVISION.
Photo by Brooke Hughes.

the British army were visible about 8 A.M. coming over the Platrand, ten miles to the south, was at first received with incredulity. But they still had plenty of time, and the commanders hurried to the posts already assigned to them by De la Rey. The Heidelberg commando and Blake's Irishmen occupied kopjes west and north-west of the village, the Wakkerstroom commando, with two Creusots and a pom-pom, a position to the south-east, and the Ermelo commando, with the third Creusot and a pom-pom, held the heights commanding the Os Spruit valley. About 500 stayed behind in Brandfort to guard the transport and move it away if necessary. Altogether, De la Rey had between 2,000 and 3,000 round Brandfort on this day.*

Capture of Brandfort by Hutton.

Lord Roberts adopted his favourite tactics of prolonging his line, in this case to about eighteen miles, so as to be certain of overlapping the Boers, and though he did not succeed in cutting off many of them, the capture of Brandfort was effected with the greatest ease. Hutton had some skirmishing with Blake's Irish and the Heidelbergers on the west, but by noon he had driven them away from their last standing place by the fire of "G" Battery and an attack by the 3rd Battalion M.I. under Captain Anley. At 12.30 Major Cradock and Lieutenant Ross, with half a dozen New Zealanders, took possession of the village, and Hutton pushed on the rest of his men to the high ground further north, whence a long convoy and a stream of fugitives, too far off for effective pursuit, could be seen hurrying northwards. Shortly afterwards Lord Roberts and the Eleventh Division entered the town, having experienced hardly any opposition.

Tucker and Henry's M.I. delayed by De la Rey on the east.

On the eastern flank, where the Boers were in greater force and the country was more broken, the progress of Lord Roberts's right was somewhat slower; the presence of De la Rey himself on this side also no doubt stirred his men to a more obstinate resistance. But even here the Boers could only hope to delay the English for a time and manœuvre so as not to allow their own retreat to be cut

* The British intelligence had reported that there were 5,000 or 6,000 Boers in Brandfort with ten guns.

off. So far they succeeded; the Wakkerstroom men delaying Tucker, with Wavell's brigade, in the neighbourhood of Zuurfontein till the afternoon, while Maxwell was kept in check till nearly sunset by the burghers of Ermelo. On this occasion the action of the 4th and 8th Corps M.I. was disappointing, for though they were well up to the front they did not succeed in closing with the Boers, who lost neither guns nor prisoners.

Ian Hamilton reaches Isabellafontein, Colvile six miles further back.

On the Winburg road Ian Hamilton reached Isabellafontein without opposition, and Colvile camped six miles behind him at Papjesfontein.

Boer rout begins.

The occupation of Brandfort and Ian Hamilton's advance towards Winburg had, for the time being, the effects anticipated by Lord Roberts, of relieving most of the pressure on his right flank, and of sending the Free State Boers up north. De Wet, with Lemmer and Olivier, forsook Thaba 'Nchu and hurried up with most of their commandos to the Zand River,* leaving only General P. H. de Villiers, with the Ficksburg (De Villiers), Wepener (Roux), and Smithfield (Potgieter) commandos to defend the Ladybrand region and oppose General Rundle. Philip Botha and Grobler managed to keep part of their commandos together to defend the approaches to Winburg, but a great many of their men dispersed to their farms in the east and north-east of the Free State. Similarly, De la Rey's force went off partly towards Winburg, partly up north towards the Vet River. Foreign observers of the helter-skelter flight seem to have looked on it as the beginning of a regular *débâcle*. And no wonder; for Cape carts, wagons, single horsemen, and pack animals were all streaming up along the roads without any semblance of order or discipline. Some, no doubt, of the less stalwart fighters had already had enough fighting, but the majority had no intention of giving up the struggle and were only dispersing in order to reassemble for a form of fighting more suited to their temperament than pitched battles against overwhelming numbers. The leaders, however, were still for the most

* From the Zand River, however, de Wet sent back Crowther with the Ladybrand commando to help De Villiers.

part anxious to dispute Lord Roberts's advance wherever they could gather together enough men for a stand. This haphazard method of warfare turned out in the end to be the best means of deceiving the English as to the character of the struggle on which they were engaged; for the impression gained ground that the small forces which were so easily pushed aside represented all the fighting elements left among the Boers.

May 4, Roberts halts, but Hutton and Ian Hamilton sent towards the Vet River.

On May 4 Lord Roberts halted with his infantry at Brandfort, to give time for the railway to be repaired and supplies forwarded;* but on either flank he sent forward Hutton and Ian Hamilton as far as the Vet River, the former to cut the railway at its junction with the Winburg line and the latter to secure the drifts south of Winburg. His object was to be able to close in on the Boers and cut off their retreat if, as his information led him to expect, they opposed the passage of his infantry over the Vet River.

Hutton after a small fight finds the Boers too strong at the Vet River, so retires.

Hutton, starting west of the railway, found part of De la Rey's force strongly posted on a ridge about halfway to Smaldeel, where it was covering the retreat of a convoy visible about five miles away. "G" Battery was at once brought into action and the 3rd M.I. Corps deployed for a frontal attack, while Colonel Alderson took the 1st Corps to the west with the intention of outflanking the Boers. They anticipated this manœuvre by extending in the same direction so as to avoid being outflanked; whereupon Major Cradock, with the New Zealand M.I., taking advantage of the consequent weakening of the centre, made a dash for the ridge and drove the Boers from the position. But they had gained their object, for the convoy was out of reach and they were themselves able to retire to the main body on the Vet River. Here their position appeared to be so strong, that Hutton felt it would be hopeless either to

* The line between Karee Siding and Brandfort had been broken in two places, but during the advance on the 3rd a construction train was following close behind the Eleventh Division, and one of the damaged culverts was actually repaired under fire. By 2 P.M. on the 4th the railway was in working order up to Brandfort, and the construction train was at work rebuilding the bridge which the Boers had previously destroyed.

turn it or force it with the numbers at his disposal. Leaving strong pickets at Constantia, he fell back on Oude Aanleg for the night.

Ian Hamilton finds Philip Botha on the Babiaansberg.

Ian Hamilton was also opposed in his advance from Isabellafontein, and before the day ended was glad of Colvile's support. After the retreat from Houtnek Philip Botha had collected some of the stragglers in the hilly country near Welkom Farm to defend the approaches to the Vet River. He was occupying the Babiaansberg,* or mountain of baboons, a prominent kopje four miles north of Isabellafontein, round which the road winds to a nek at its north-west corner. This nek connects the Babiaansberg with the ridge which extends in a south-westerly direction towards Brandfort.

He and Colvile drive the Boers off,

Ian Hamilton passed round the southern end of Babiaansberg without attacking Botha, although shells from a Creusot gun began to fall among his troops. As he came round the corner he saw a party of Boers advancing along the ridge from Brandfort to effect a junction with Botha. To prevent this he sent forward Broadwood, supported by Kitchener's Horse, and "P" and "O" Batteries to seize the nek in front of him, keeping the 5th M.I. and Roberts's Horse, under Major Lean, to protect his right flank. Broadwood was in possession of the nek before the fugitives from Brandfort could reach it. An hour later, Massie's two 5-inch guns arrived with the infantry below the ridge and drove them precipitately on to the Vet River. Meanwhile, Botha's gun on the Babiaansberg had been enfilading the infantry. At 9.30, just in the nick of time, Colvile came up on to a range of kopjes two miles to the south and took stock of the position. He saw immediately that he could best help Ian Hamilton by clearing the Boers off the Babiaansberg. He therefore sent the Highland Brigade through Ian Hamilton's baggage train to scale the mountain, and brought Grant's naval guns on to the eastern edge of the kopje on which he was standing, to assist their attack. In spite of the good shelter enjoyed by the Boers on the southern edge of the berg,

* In the more recent maps this local name for the mountain does not appear; it is the kopje on the farm marked Josephina's Dal.

the Black Watch, under Colonel Carthew-Yorstoun, who were the leading battalion of the Highlanders, making excellent use of all available cover, drove them out of it by 11.30 A.M. Just before the southern crest had been carried by Colvile, Smith-Dorrien had wheeled the C.I.V. and Camerons, supported by the Sussex, to the right and seized the northern extension of the mountain. The mounted infantry, who had been left by Ian Hamilton on the right flank, might have made a more vigorous effort to cut the Boers off as they retreated from the mountain. Their failure gave the Boers leisure to get all their transport across the very difficult Welkom Drift and on to Winburg. However, they made no attempt to oppose the crossing of the Vet River, although the drift would have been an easy one to defend. The approach from the south is down a steep glacis, while the northern bank is covered with irregular masses of rock which completely command the road across the river. On the evening of the 4th Ian Hamilton camped at Welkom, having sent some cavalry patrols across the river to hold the drift, and a party to cut the line between Winburg and Smaldeel: the last train had, however, left Winburg early on the 4th. Colvile stopped at Susannafontein at the south-western edge of the Babiaansberg.

And Ian Hamilton secures Welkom Drift on the Vet River on May 4.

On the 5th May Lord Roberts was ready for the general advance over the Vet River.

5th May.

On the east Ian Hamilton, being already in possession of Welkom Drift, marched to Winburg, a picturesque little Dutch town in a hollow, and one of the oldest in the Free State. It was of some strategic importance at that time, being situated on a branch of the main line, and containing accumulations of supplies. Philip Botha and Grobler were therefore anxious to defend it, but were unable to rally their men; moreover the inhabitants themselves were not anxious to stand a siege. Botha indeed made some attempt at intimidating General Ian Hamilton's A.D.C., who had been sent forward to negotiate the surrender with the landdrost, but, seeing that resistance was hopeless, he went off and left the town to its fate. Hamilton occupied it on the afternoon of 5th May.

Hamilton occupies Winburg.

In the centre and on the western flank De la Rey's resist-

De la Rey prepares to defend the Vet River.

ance was of a somewhat more serious character, though even he found the force of two or three thousand, which he had at Brandfort, reduced by more than one-half when he came to post it along the Vet River. On his right he placed the Heidelberg commando and some guns under Commandant de Beer at Misgunstfontein Drift, six miles west of the railway; in the centre he held the drift near the railway bridge, which had already been blown up, and two kopjes south of the river with the remains of the Ermelo and Wakkerstroom commandos and the German corps; later in the day he detached part of this force to stop an enveloping movement on his left flank.

Roberts's disposition for attacking him.

Lord Roberts's own column was now drawn up in *échelon* from the left, with Hutton half-way between Brandfort and the Vet River, the Eleventh Division at Brandfort, twenty-two miles south of the river, and the Seventh at Zuurfontein slightly south-east of Brandfort. If on the 4th Hutton had been able to carry out Lord Roberts's intentions and secure a position over the Vet River, on the 5th he might possibly have held De la Rey to his ground until the Eleventh Division had come up to complete his discomfiture; under the actual circumstances the best result would probably have been attained by keeping Hutton where he was until the infantry were level with him and then delivering a simultaneous attack on flank and centre. As it was, the only real fighting was done by Hutton's M.I., who arrived at Misgunstfontein Drift at noon, whereas the Eleventh and Seventh Divisions had not reached the Vet River till the afternoon.

Hutton on the left flank drives back the Boers and crosses the Vet River.

Hutton found the Heidelberg commando so strongly posted at Misgunstfontein Drift that he determined to turn their flank before engaging on a frontal attack. Hearing from a local farmer that there was a disused drift two and a half miles further west, he directed Colonel Alderson to take the 1st M.I. Corps thither. Without much difficulty the 1st Battalion M.I. under Major Amphlett crossed the drift, and were joined by two companies of the Canadians under Lieutenants Borden and Turner, who swam over under fire, the rest of the Canadians remaining in support on the southern bank. When General Hutton saw Alderson's M.I. turning eastwards across the river towards the plateau which commanded the main drift,

he ordered the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, covered by the fire of "G" Battery and supported by Pilcher's Queensland and New Zealand Mounted Rifles, to lead the way over the main drift and secure the high ground beyond. The Colonials dashed through the drift, but only to find themselves in a sort of basin, with the Boers rapidly occupying the surrounding heights. Thereupon Captain Anley, without waiting for orders, led his 3rd Battalion M.I. over the river at a crossing he found further to the east, and galloped in extended order round the flanks of the Boers. By this manœuvre the Boers were forced to yield the high ground they were occupying to the Colonials and to withdraw from the drift. Surprised by the impetuous attack of the New South Wales Rifles, the Boer rearguard in covering the retirement of the guns suffered the loss of nine killed and fourteen wounded; and one Maxim gun was captured early in the action by the New Zealanders. General Hutton crossed at 4.45 P.M., and the whole of his force went into bivouac on the right bank of the river. Altogether this was a very well managed and gallantly fought little engagement on the British side; the casualties in Hutton's force during the day were only four wounded, but this was not due to any want of dash among the combatants. To General Hutton the credit is largely due that a force so recently brought together under one command, and composed of so many heterogeneous elements of the British race, already showed such soldierly instincts and so excellent a spirit of cohesion. The men, it is true, were keen enough to fight and distinguish themselves, but the general's evident appreciation of good work and the enthusiasm with which he encouraged the spirit of national unity among them, helped greatly to consolidate them.

Roberts's centre, however, only reaches Eensgevonden six miles south of the river.

Lord Roberts now had each flank across the Vet River; Ian Hamilton at Winburg and Hutton south of Smaldeel. The centre was not so fortunate. When Major Pilkington's West Australians in advance of the Eleventh Division had come within range of the kopjes held by the Boers south of the river, they were checked until Pole-Carew had brought up his three field batteries and his heavy guns. These kopjes were not occupied till dusk, when the Boers retreated across

the river. The 15th Brigade with General Tucker arrived behind the Eleventh Division and had no chance of action; the 4th and 8th M.I., who were on the right of the 14th Brigade, had a small engagement with some Boers detached from the centre to oppose them higher up the Vet River. Although by nightfall the Boers were retreating from all their positions, it was then too dark to take the infantry across the river as Lord Roberts had intended, so he halted near Eensgevonden, six miles south of it. During the night Hutton sent Captain Macdonell with a squadron of the 2nd Canadian M.R. to cut the telegraph wire north of Smaldeel and destroy a culvert. Captain Macdonell had an adventurous ride through two columns of the retreating Boers and succeeded in cutting the telegraph, but as the last train had already gone north, no rolling-stock was captured.

So far Boers not defeated.

So far Lord Roberts had carried out his programme of ground to be covered much as he had laid it down, but otherwise had inflicted no defeat on the Boers, who simply retired as the English advanced. Both sides, however, seem to have expected that a more decisive engagement would be delivered on the Zand River, and the next three days were employed in preparations for it.

May 6, Roberts misses the opportunity of cutting off the Boers.

The Boers had been retiring towards the Zand River all through the night of the 5th,* and left no rearguard to prevent the West Australians from occupying Smaldeel at the junction of the Winburg railway at 8.45 A.M. on the 6th. Hutton arrived later in the day, but the Eleventh Division, owing to the difficulty of getting the transport over the bad drift on the Vet River, was not concentrated there till the morning of the 7th. Tucker was directed to bring the Seventh Division and the 4th and 8th M.I. corps as far as Osfontein on the Smaldeel-Winburg line, and Ian Hamilton, who moved out of Winburg on the 6th, to halt at Dankbaarfontein, ten miles further north. Colvile took his place at Winburg.† On the 6th both Hutton and Ian

* It is stated that at least 3,000 or 4,000 burghers streamed out of Smaldeel on this occasion. Of these, not nearly half had been holding the position on the river.

† For Colvile's further movements, see chap. vii., pp. 245 *sqq.*

Hamilton were anxious to press forward and harass the Boers before they had time to take up a new position; but Lord Roberts would not hear of their proposals or risk the danger of his wings becoming involved in serious engagements at a distance from any supports. It seems curious that though Lord Roberts undoubtedly under-estimated the fighting potentialities of the Boers who were scattered about the country, he occasionally exaggerated to himself the offensive powers of those with the main bodies. There is very little doubt, in view of their precipitate retreat to the Zand River, that considerable profit, unattended by much risk, would have resulted from a determined pursuit by Hutton and Ian Hamilton on the 6th May. For it was not till the following day that Louis Botha arrived at the Zand River with his reinforcements, and infused fresh spirit into his countrymen, who had been thoroughly discouraged by the rapidity of Lord Roberts's overwhelming advance. The only operation sanctioned by Lord Roberts between the 5th and 9th of May was a reconnaissance up to the Zand River (22 miles) by Hutton on the 7th. By this time the Boers were intrenched, and Hutton found them ready for him with guns near Virginia Siding. After he had viewed the strength of their position and seen the railway bridge blown up before his eyes, he returned to the Doorn River near Welgelegen Siding, where he remained in readiness for the advance.

May 7, reconnaissance by Hutton to Zand River.

Up to this stage in his advance Lord Roberts, it will be remembered, had been without his cavalry. On the 3rd May General French had handed over the command at Thaba 'Nchu to General Rundle, and on the 4th his three cavalry brigades—1st (Porter), 3rd (Gordon), and 4th (Dickson)—had been concentrated round Bloemfontein to refit and obtain remounts. During the last two months and a half the cavalry had been employed almost continuously, whereas the food for the horses had been quite insufficient. As a result, the waste of animals had been very great and, in spite of the numbers of remounts previously issued, the 3rd Brigade still required 443 horses; and even the 4th, which had been formed only a month before, wanted 454 to bring the numbers of the squadrons up to 120 apiece. By the begin-

May 8, French with the cavalry now joins Roberts.

ning of May there was no dearth of remounts in Bloemfontein, and the three brigades were promptly brought up to the required strength of about 3,000,* but the animals being still raw and soft, required some nursing. French therefore proposed, when he started on the 7th, to catch up the main army by easy stages. But Lord Roberts could not afford the time for further delay, nor, in view of the strength of the Boers opposed to him, dispense any longer with his cavalry. He accordingly ordered General French to be at the Vet River by the 8th. This order was carried out, but the 3rd and 4th Brigades had in consequence to march sixty miles in two days, and 184 horses were sent back as unfit for further use.

Preparations for a battle on the Zand River.

Roberts's supplies.

While the army was again coming into line, the engineers were working at the deviation over the Vet River. Supplies were meanwhile being sent up to railhead on the southern bank and distributed by wagons to the different units. Up to this point the engineers had been able to repair the railway so rapidly that the supply of the central column was not a difficult matter. By the 9th the Seventh and Eleventh Divisions had six days' rations for the men and four days' forage for the horses. It was not so easy to supply Ian Hamilton's column, which was marching at a distance of thirty to sixty miles from the railway, and which required fifty wagon-loads a day of food and forage. The column was therefore burdened with no less than 500 wagons drawn by 5,000 mules to carry reserve supplies, some of which were sent as often as possible to be filled at the railway. At this time, however, Ian Hamilton was well supplied, as at Winburg he had obtained a convoy from Karee Siding, and had also filled up his empty wagons with three days' supplies left in

* On the morning of the 6th May the following may be taken as an approximately correct statement of the effective strength of the three cavalry brigades before leaving Bloemfontein for the Vet River :—

	Sabres.	Guns.	Machine Guns.
1st Cavalry Brigade and T Battery	1,195	6	7
3rd „ „ and R „	1,140	6	7
4th „ „ and O „	770	6	5
Total	3,105	18	19

the town by the Boers. The only column which was badly off was Colvile's, who had come into Winburg, to find it nearly cleared out by Ian Hamilton, and who only received his first convoy on the 12th by railway from Smaldeel.

Boer preparations.

The Boers had also received reinforcements, for the two Presidents had determined that a serious attempt should be made on the Zand River to check the British advance. President Kruger himself could not leave Pretoria to encourage the burghers, as the meeting of the Volksraad was due, but he had already ordered Louis Botha, the new Acting Commandant-General, to bring from Natal the Standerton and Bethal commandos, and to take charge personally of the operations in the Free State. These reinforcements should have arrived earlier, but the men had outstayed the two days' leave, granted to them for the purpose of revisiting their homes, and might never have returned to the front at all unless Botha had addressed peremptory telegrams to their landdrosts,* and had finally gone round himself to collect them. At last, on the 7th May, he arrived with the truant commandos at Virginia Siding. He could then muster 3,000 Transvaalers, taken from the Ermelo, Wakkerstroom, Heidelberg, Standerton, Bethal and Waterberg commandos, besides

Louis Botha comes to take command with Standerton and Bethal commandos as reinforcements.

He now has 3,000 Transvaalers on Zand River

* The following telegram was sent from Commandant-General Louis Botha to the Landdrosts of Ermelo, Wakkerstroom, Standerton, Heidelberg, and Bethal: "Notwithstanding the definite and repeated instructions which you have received from time to time from me, as well as from the Government to see that all the Burghers in your district are at their posts at their commandos, it has been reported to me repeatedly that there are still many men at their homes, and on their farms. The situation is, as you are aware, very serious. I can inform you further that our country is in such a state that the strongest measures are necessary, and that every one should do his duty, and try his best to do everything in his power and thus try to avert the danger, and every one who does not do his duty to the best of his ability, or neglects to do that which he could and ought to do renders himself liable to be accused of assisting the enemy who are threatening our independence, country, etc. As Commandant I order you and all the Burghers to use all the power you possess to persuade all men who are able to carry arms to proceed to the front. You should yourself commandeer all holders of passes whose passes have been countersigned by Commandants and Field Cornets, and send them up so that all countersign passes might be checked. Act on this immediately because every minute lost is in itself a wrong which you are doing to your country and kindred."

a few scouts and some foreigners. On Botha's arrival De la Rey had been sent to organise the somewhat laxly-managed commandos on the Western border, and to make a vigorous opposition to the Mafeking relief force, the success of which might facilitate a dangerous flank movement on Pretoria.

And de Wet has 5,000 Free Staters

About the same date the two de Wets, Lemmer and Olivier had crossed the Zand River and joined Philip Botha and Grobler on the west of the Doornberg. Except for the Ficksburg, Ladybrand, Wepener, and Smithfield commandos, all the Free Staters in arms were now assembled on the Zand River, but owing to abstentions and desertions they cannot at most have numbered more than 5,000. President Steyn himself came to the fighting-line with words of encouragement for the fighters, and then hurried back to Kroonstad to urge the laggards in the town to join their comrades in defending their homes and their liberty.*

Boer object to defend Kroonstad.

The chief object of the Boer leaders in concentrating their men on the Zand River was to defend Kroonstad. This town, the second in importance in the Free State to Bloemfontein, had, since the middle of March, become the seat of government, the organizing centre for commandos, and the chief depôt for stores of all kinds. As a first line of defence for the town the Zand River, forty miles to the south, had great advantages. On the northern bank there is an almost continuous ridge running from a few miles west of the railway to Junction Drift on the east, to the top of which

* As he was addressing the men at the station on May 8th, a train full of burghers steamed out to the front, and he made use of the incident in the following words:—

"Look, burghers! there are your brothers going forward to take part in the struggle which you and I have to carry to its end; and are you going to stand here while they are fighting for their country? The sympathies of the whole civilised world are with you. Our cause is just. Strangers have joined the ranks. Don't let it be said hereafter that the burghers remained at home, and walked about in their streets while strangers were fighting for them. We have fought against the hordes of Great Britain for more than seven months; we can fight seven times as long if necessary. Go then, burghers, in God's name, for the cause of your dear country, for your wives and your children. It is better to die on the battlefield than to become slaves of your ancient enemy. The war is not yet over; we can still win. He who refuses to fight for his country will have the blood of his fallen brothers on his head."

the ground rises gently from the river without affording any cover, while on the southern bank the ground offers few positions for artillery to cover a crossing. Behind the Zand River the Boschrand ridges, ten miles south of Kroonstad, formed a good rearguard position to cover a retreat.

Botha's right flank weak, his centre held by most of Transvaalers near the railway.

Botha seems to have expected that the brunt of Lord Roberts's attack would fall on his centre and left flank. His most westerly posts were at Diamant Drift, only six miles from the railway, where a detachment of the Heidelberg commando under Commandant Weilbach was stationed, and at a point twelve miles further north, where Commandant De Beer had another detachment of the same commando. In the centre near Virginia Siding he had the remaining Transvaal commandos, Philip Botha's Kroonstad commando and Pretorius's battery of Krupp guns. There appears to have been some doubt in Botha's mind whether it would be better to concentrate most of these troops on the Zand River, to meet an attack from the south, or, in order to meet one from the west, on the Riet Spruit, which crosses the railway five miles further north and falls into the Zand between the railway and Diamant Drift. Eventually, after moving his commandos backwards and forwards for two days, he decided to hold both lines, with the chief strength on the Zand River. His left flank extended for twenty miles to the Doornberg, at the foot of which the two de Wets had their laager; the intervening drifts of the Zand River being held by Commandants Fourie, Olivier and Lemmer, with their Free State commandos and Andersen's guns.

Left flank held by de Wet.

Obviously the weak point of this scheme of defence was the western wing, which was too close to the main body to oppose a wide turning movement successfully; the eastern wing, on the other hand, was so extended and so strong that it seemed to have a considerable chance of enveloping Ian Hamilton if he became too far separated from the main body.

British dispositions.

Roberts now had a great chance of surprising Kroonstad and capturing all the Boer supplies and material of war in the Free State. There were several drifts west of Diamant

Chance of surprising Kroonstad by the cavalry not taken by Roberts.

Drift; by any one of these French's cavalry could have crossed without attracting notice, and by keeping well to the west could have been north of Kroonstad before they were observed. Meanwhile the rest of the army would have been occupying the Boer forces forty miles to the south. But Lord Roberts would not take the risk. The journey from Bloemfontein had convinced him that the cavalry horses were not yet in a condition to execute long and rapid marches without a dangerous weakening of their effective strength, and though a few days' rest and good feeding would no doubt have fitted them for the ride of seventy or eighty miles, which such a movement would have entailed, he was even more anxious to advance quickly than to delay for a possible prize. He therefore adopted a compromise, and instead of cutting off Kroonstad as well as the Boer army, only attempted to cut off Botha. The plan was for French with his 1st and 4th Brigades and Hutton's M.I., about 4,000 men altogether, to sweep round to Ventersburg siding, while Broadwood, with the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, was to make a similar turning movement on the east and close in behind the Boers at the same point. The Eleventh Division and the 3rd Cavalry Brigade were to attack the Boer centre; and owing to the strength of the Boer left, Tucker was ordered to draw in closer to Ian Hamilton. These two generals, acting in close co-operation, were to force the Junction and Koolspruit Drifts.

Scheme adopted to attempt a smaller turning movement.

May 9, preliminary movements by Roberts's columns.

On the 9th May, Porter, starting early from Smaldeel, occupied Du Preez Laager Drift, west of Commandant Weilbach's position, without opposition. Here he was joined later in the day by General French and his staff, and by General Hutton with his M.I. Dickson, starting from Biesjesfontein with the 4th Cavalry Brigade, had reached Kalkoen Kranz a few miles south of Du Preez Laager Drift by the evening. On the same day Lord Roberts himself, with the Eleventh Division and Gordon's cavalry, advanced to Welgelegen siding, eight miles south of the Zand River; Tucker, with the Seventh Division and the 4th and 8th M.I. Corps, arrived at Merriesfontein, about three miles south-west of Junction Drift, and Ian Hamilton with the

Winburg column at Koolspruit Drift, on his right. In the course of the afternoon Lord Roberts rode over to Merriesfontein, where he found that he had under-estimated de Wet's strength. The 7th M.I. Corps were, it is true, able to effect a crossing at Koolspruit Drift in the course of the day, after driving away the Boers posted there by General Olivier, but Ian Hamilton reported that the Boers further east were working round his right flank. Roberts therefore thought it safer to bring Ian Hamilton and Tucker even closer to one another, and ordered both to cross at Junction Drift. At the same time he detached the 4th and 8th Corps from Tucker's division and employed them on the following day with the central column. On the evening of the 9th May Lord Roberts had 38,000 men, 100 guns, and 12 pom-poms distributed at the angles of a triangle, of which the apex was Welgelegen and the base extended for twenty miles along the Zand River, between Du Preez Laager Drift and Merriesfontein. Louis Botha had between Diamant Drift and the Doornberg 8,000 mounted men, 20 guns, and a few pom-poms.

10th May, French sweeps round on Botha's right.

On May 10 French, with Porter's brigade, followed by Hutton's M.I., moved rapidly from Du Preez Laager Drift in a north-easterly direction past the Dirksburg Diamond Mine until he came to a ridge whence he could overlook the Riet Spruit position. Leaving a squadron to hold this ridge until Hutton came up, French pushed on with the rest of Porter's brigade to Vredes Verdrag, from which he thought he would be able to command the Boers' right flank. So far he had met with no opposition, for Louis Botha had no idea that there were any English west of the railway —in fact, when French arrived, a large force of Boers, who had passed the night in the Riet Spruit intrenchments, could be seen moving south towards Virginia siding, where the chief attack was expected.

His appearance causes Botha to retreat hastily

But this sudden appearance of French upset all the Boer leader's plans. Anxious lest his retreat should be cut off and Kroonstad isolated, he immediately sent off a reserve of 200 mounted burghers to oppose the cavalry, and felt obliged to order a general retreat to the ridges on the west of the railway, leaving only a small rearguard and some guns at

leaving a small force to oppose Roberts, and strengthening the wing opposed to French.

French has considerable opposition.

Virginia siding to delay Lord Roberts. These measures were successful for the immediate purpose, for French was prevented from reaching the railway at Ventersburg Road, and was constantly hampered in getting further north during the rest of the day. His first check occurred at Vredes Verdrag. As Porter's brigade approached the ridge they came under the fire of two Boer guns in the foreground; three squadrons taken from the Australian Horse, the Inniskillings and the Greys, and half a squadron of the Carabiniers, were thereupon ordered to seize an apparently unoccupied kopje on the flank of those guns. The squadrons, dismounting and leaving their horses below, took possession of the kopje, but shortly afterwards were set upon by a party of the Waterberg commando, who had been lying in ambush in a donga, and now crept up the hill, stampeded the horses, and poured a withering fire on the cavalrymen. These, belonging to several different units and being apparently under no single command, made no stand, but were driven in confusion down the hill, losing fourteen killed and thirty-six wounded, besides two officers and twenty-five men prisoners. The whole affair was so sudden that the brigade, which was only about a mile off, watched the proceedings, without making any attempt to rescue the advance-guard from their predicament.* Subsequently the attacking party, emboldened by success, and reinforced by more Boers from the centre, made a determined attempt to cut off the rest of the brigade, which was only extricated by the arrival of Alderson's M.I., sent to their assistance by Hutton from the Riet Spruit ridge. Meanwhile the 4th Brigade, which had started from Kalkoen Kranz, had come up, whereupon French, anxious to push on, led it past the west of Vredes Verdrag towards Posen, the next hill to the north, telling Alderson and Porter to follow when they were free.

All the way to Posen Dickson's brigade was under fire from the east, and one specially adventurous party of Boers,

* Colonel Porter had been called some miles to the rear to confer with General French, leaving Colonel Alexander of the Greys in temporary charge of the brigade. Porter came back when it was already too late to attempt a rescue.

who came out into the open, were only driven off by a cavalry charge ordered by General French. The horses were too tired, however, to carry the charge home with much effect, so that the party of Boers only lost three prisoners and seven killed. French reached Posen about 4 P.M., but finding the Boers strong enough to prevent his approaching the railway line, he went on to bivouac at Zonderhout farm, west of Geneva siding, with Dickson's brigade. Porter, coming up later, reached a point rather more to the north-east on the farm Graspan. Hutton, during the afternoon, had been following up French and driving away the Boers left in his rear and flank; but he was fighting under difficulties, as Alderson's M.I. had been sent on to support Porter, and Pilcher had missed his direction. Consequently he was left with only the New Zealand M.I., some Queenslanders, and "G" Battery, until, as he was fighting his way along the Vredes Verdrag ridge, he fell in with Loch's and Lumsden's Horse of the 8th M.I. Corps. With this accession of strength he reached a bivouac between Dickson and Pilcher on his left front, and Porter and Alderson on his right front.

French and Hutton reach a point west of Geneva siding.

The withdrawal of Botha's centre to oppose French made easy work for Lord Roberts's own column. His advance guard, consisting of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade and the 4th and 8th M.I. corps, with "J" * and "R" Batteries, crossed the railway drift with hardly any opposition early in the morning. Then began a running fight with the Boers, who retired as the cavalry and M.I. advanced along the railway right up to Ventersburg Road siding.† The Eleventh Division, with whom Lord Roberts was riding, had no difficulty beyond getting the transport over the Zand River Drift, and bivouacked at Riet Spruit siding, six miles north of the river.

Roberts himself has little opposition.

The nearest approach to a pitched battle for the crossing of the Zand was on Roberts's right flank, where Generals Tucker and Ian Hamilton, though exercising independent commands, co-operated with much success. On the night

Tucker and Hamilton have the chief fighting on the east.

* "J" Battery had come up from Bloemfontein with Porter's brigade, and thenceforward was attached to Henry's M.I.

† The casualties were few, but among them was Captain Head, commanding the 8th Battalion M.I., a very promising and gallant officer

of the 9th May the Derbys from Bruce Hamilton's brigade occupied Junction Drift, which had most unaccountably been left unguarded by General Lemmer. At 5.30 on the 10th Massie's two 5-inch guns began shelling the heights on the north bank.* Under cover of their fire the whole of Bruce Hamilton's brigade crossed over and proceeded to attack the semicircular position held by the Boers about a mile from the river, but they were soon checked by the fire of two Boer guns skilfully placed on a ridge to the north-east. Just then General Tucker came up to the drift from Merriesfontein with the 15th Brigade (Wavell) leading and the 14th (Maxwell) in support. He immediately ordered his 62nd and 75th Batteries to come into action from a kopje south of the drift, but finding that they could not reach the guns that were stopping Bruce Hamilton, he sent the 18th Battery under Major Scott, escorted by the 1st East Lancashires and half the 2nd Cheshires, across the river. By 8.30 A.M. this battery was in action from a good position about 1,000 yards north-east of the drift. For some time it was exposed to a cross fire from a single gun and a pom-pom on the east at a range of 3,600 yards, and from two long-range guns about 4,000 yards to the west; but the latter guns were shortly afterwards engaged by the 62nd and 75th Batteries, which were sent over the river to support the 18th Battery. The three batteries, assisted by a well-placed shell from one of Ian Hamilton's 5-inch guns at a range of 8,000 yards, speedily subdued the fire of the gun and pom-pom on the north-east and drove them out of action. The 18th Battery, though heavily shelled, escaped with slight loss, as the Boer shells were only fitted with percussion fuses, which burst on impact in the soft ground without any effect.† During this artillery action Tucker ordered Maxwell's brigade to make Junction Drift easier for the passage of his own transport, and another drift a little distance to the east for Ian Hamilton's. He thus avoided the confusion which would

* On the previous afternoon the route to the position chosen had been marked out with pegs, whereby the guns could be moved thither under cover of darkness.

† The casualties in the battery were only one man killed and two wounded.

have resulted if both had tried to cross at the same drift. The 19th Brigade and the 7th M.I. Corps had meanwhile been engaged in a sharp skirmish with about 800 Boers who, under cover of the scrub on either bank of the river bed, were trying to envelop Ian Hamilton's right rear. Then the 19th Brigade crossed the river and joined in the general attack on the Boer positions.

On the left the Lancashires, South Wales Borderers, and Cheshires of Wavell's brigade attacked the ridges to the north-west. Inclining well to the left, so as not to overlap the 21st Brigade, they advanced towards the kopjes, where some of the Boer guns were in action. The enemy vacated their position on the approach of the British infantry, whose advance was covered by the well-directed fire of the guns. By 11.30 A.M. all firing had ceased at this part of the field, and the 14th Brigade coming up, the whole of the Seventh Division reached Deelfontein Noord at 1 P.M. and bivouacked for the night. The total casualties in the division were only 11 killed and wounded.

In the centre the 21st Brigade also moved forward, and the Sussex, who were leading, cleared the ridge in front with a rush which cost the battalion only 3 killed and 12 wounded. On the right their line was prolonged by the Gordons, while the rest of the 19th Brigade remained to hold the river and prevent another attack by the Boer left.

Broadwood's turning movement does not come off.

It was not till 11 A.M., when the northerly ridge had been gained by Bruce Hamilton, that Broadwood, with his cavalry brigade, De Lisle's M.I. and "Q" Battery, moved out through the infantry line to execute the turning movement to Ventersburg Road siding. Even then he was late in starting, and had hardly crossed the river before "Q" Battery, by an unfortunate mistake, was recalled.* Without

* The order was conveyed to General Broadwood under a misapprehension. There were two R.H.A. batteries with Ian Hamilton's column, "P" and "Q." The latter had crossed the Zand River with General Broadwood, the former battery remained on the left bank, as the horses were too tired to push on with the cavalry. General Ian Hamilton intended this battery to go to the help of the 7th Corps Mounted Infantry on his right flank, but by a mistake of the messenger the order was taken to "Q" instead of to "P" Battery.

it Broadwood did not feel equal to pushing through the Boer rearguard to the railway. Thinking that the pressure on the right flank was the reason for the battery's recall, he turned eastwards to relieve it; then sending a detachment under Colonel Fenwick of the Blues to occupy Ventersburg village, he himself followed up a Boer convoy and captured a few wagons and prisoners.

By the evening Boers everywhere in retreat.

By the evening the Boers on the east of the railway were in full retreat; most of the Free State forces had passed through Ventersburg and turned off east towards Lindley, though de Wet himself, with a small force, made his way up north-west to Kroonstad. Ian Hamilton's whole column bivouacked for the night about three miles south of Ventersburg on the Erasmus Spruit in line with Tucker at Deelfontein.

Night march ordered for French. But cavalry too tired.

At 7 o'clock on the evening of the 10th May French received an order from Lord Roberts to cut the line north of Kroonstad at daylight on the following morning. If he had been allowed to do this in the first instance without coming in so close to the Boers on the railway, this plan might have succeeded. But by this time the cavalry had already marched forty miles, fighting most of the time, and were too exhausted to start off without a night's rest on the further forty miles which the execution of this order would have entailed. Accordingly, French remained in bivouac that night. Next day he and his cavalry reached Boschpoort Drift, eight miles west of Kroonstad, where the Bothaville road crosses the Valsch, while Hutton blocked the other road west to Hoopstad. In the centre Gordon's cavalry, with Henry's M.I. Corps and the 8th Battalion M.I.,* reached the Boschrand, where, after a slight artillery duel with a Boer rearguard under Philip Botha, they halted. Lord Roberts and the Eleventh Division reached Geneva siding six miles further south. Tucker, converging towards the railway, reached Mooiplaats, five miles south-east of Lord Roberts, and Ian Hamilton came alongside of him to Twistniet.

11th May. Further advance towards Kroonstad.

* The rest of Ross's 8th M.I. Corps remained with Hutton till the 12th May.

All this day the Boers were hurrying north and north-east in spite of all efforts of Louis Botha and of Steyn to stop them. The Free State commandos were already making their way to Lindley, and the rest were flocking into Kroonstad. Although the Boschrand position had been intrenched with some care, nothing would induce the commandos to hold it when they realized that their flank had been turned and that the cavalry were coming round behind them. By the afternoon the only force left there was a small party of about 260 men with one gun, and if Gordon and the Eleventh Division had been ordered to press on they could easily have swept them aside and would probably have made some important captures in Kroonstad. For Kroonstad itself was the scene of the wildest confusion on the afternoon and evening of the 11th; burghers hurried into the town and out of it as fast as they could; Cape carts and heavily laden wagons with struggling teams of oxen were all hopelessly mixed up at the drift. At last at 5.30 Steyn, who had been trying to stem the torrent of fugitives, gave up all hope of preserving any semblance of order. After a hasty conference with Louis Botha he proclaimed Heilbron to be the new capital of the Free State and drove off thither in his four-horsed Cape cart. Still, in spite of all the turmoil, there were some remnants of method in the confusion. Late in the day it occurred to somebody that it would be a pity if the magazines full of stores of all kinds were to fall into the hands of the English, so they were broken open and pillaged by the commandos still in Kroonstad and by the townspeople, who eagerly fought for the spoil. Then, before the last stragglers left the town, the remaining stores and the magazines were set on fire and burnt. Before this the railway bridge over the Valsch had been blown up, and as the last train steamed slowly up to the Rhenoster River, where Botha was preparing to make another stand, blasting charges were dropped from it at intervals, in order to destroy the line. That very evening French had sent Major Hunter-Weston, R.E., with a small force, including the Canadian scout Burnham, on a similar mission. After a bold dash through columns of retreating Boers he also blew up a

Boers hurriedly evacuate Kroonstad.

Heilbron the new capital.

portion of the line, but it was too late, as there were no more Boers or trains to cut off.

12th May. Roberts occupies Kroonstad.

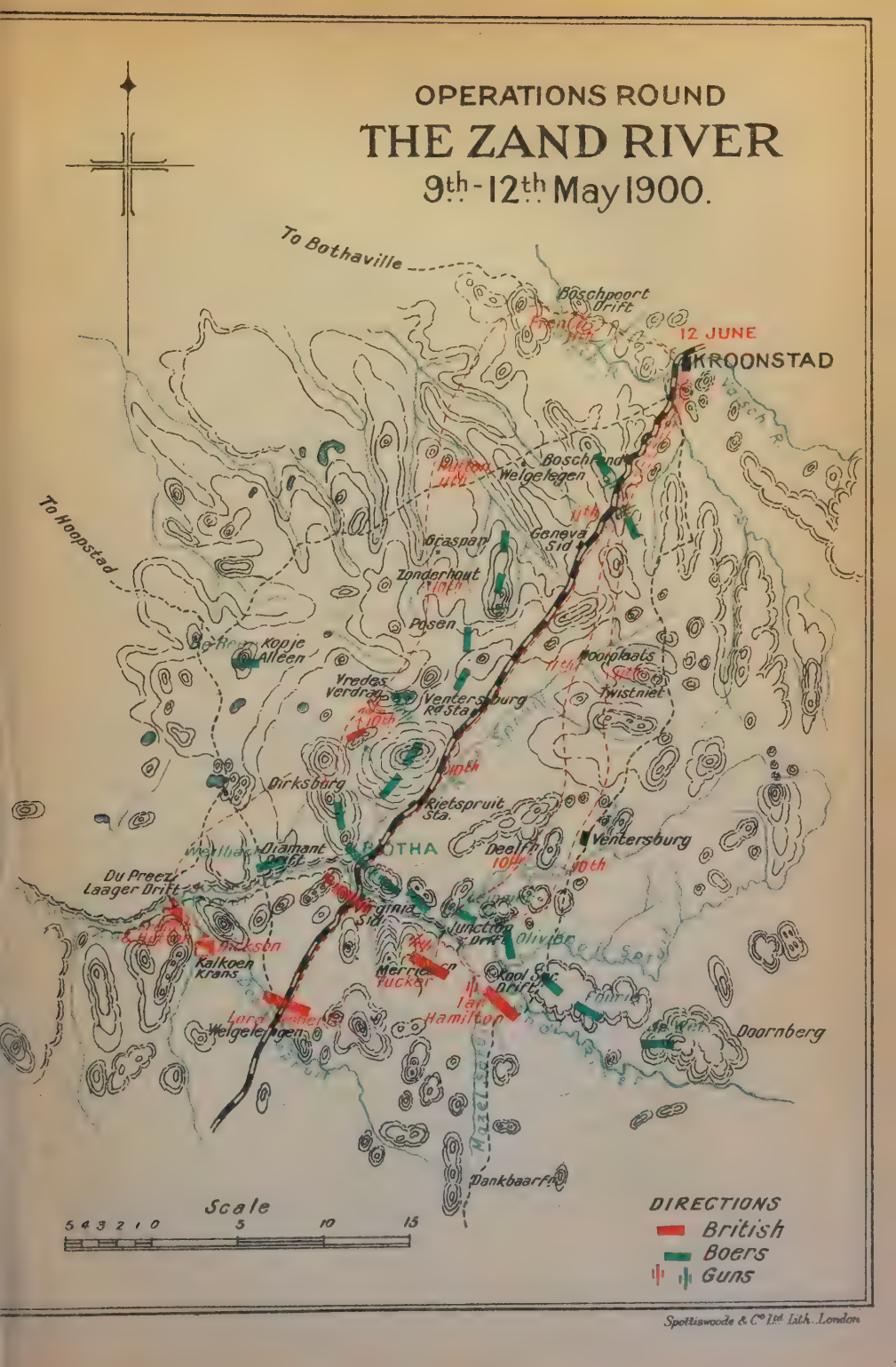
On the morning of the 12th the plan for a combined attack on the Boschrand intrenchments by Ian Hamilton, Tucker and Pole-Carew was found to be unnecessary, owing to the retreat of the Boers. Early in the morning two squadrons of French's cavalry entered Kroonstad, and about mid-day Lord Roberts, at the head of the Eleventh Division, took formal possession of the town.

Criticism of the action at Zand River.

The action of the Zand River on May 10th, which opened the way to Kroonstad, was the most important fought by Lord Roberts during his advance to Pretoria. It

The British side.

was the only one in which the whole of his main army was engaged, and the last engagement of the war in which the Transvaal and Free State forces were organized in any sense as an united army acting on one tactical plan. Henceforth for the Free State forces all semblance of pitched battles ends and the era of guerilla war definitely begins. But, judged by results, the action was disappointing. All the paraphernalia for a big battle were there, but nothing which can be dignified with the name of a battle ensued. Lord Roberts, with his overwhelming numbers, achieved nothing beyond an advance of forty miles on his journey to Pretoria, and the capture of another empty capital. More might have been gained if Roberts had sanctioned the plan for a wide sweep on Kroonstad by the cavalry in the first instance. At the worst, if the Boers had escaped while the cavalry were taking two or three days' rest to enable them to carry out a rapid surprise march, the English would not have gained less than they actually achieved. If, on the other hand, the cavalry had unexpectedly arrived to the north of Kroonstad while Botha was still facing Lord Roberts, the Boers could hardly have escaped a crushing defeat. Even the smaller turning movements planned by Lord Roberts failed, on the one side because French was too strongly opposed, and on the other because Broadwood never even attempted it. One possible reason for French's inability to force the Boer flank on the 10th May was that though he showed great rapidity in his movements, he allowed his force


OPERATIONS ROUND
THE ZAND RIVER
9th - 12th May 1900.
To Bothaville
To Hoopstad
Boschpoort Drift
12 JUNE
KROONSTAD
Welgelegen
Graspan
Geneva Sid
Zonderhout
Posen
Kopje Alleen
Vredes Verdrag
Ventersburg Rd Sta.
Doornlaagte
Twistniet
Dirksburg
Rietspruit Sta.
BOTHA
Diamant Drift
Deelfontein
Ventersburg
Du Preez Laager Drift
Virginia Rd
Junction Drift
Olivier
Kalkoen Krans
Merriespruit
Kool Spruit Drift
Hamilton
Doornberg
Dankbaarfontein
Scale
5 4 3 2 1 0 5 10 15
DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
Guns
Spottiswoode & Co Ltd Lith. London

to become too dispersed and was never able to concentrate sufficiently on any one point. He was no doubt justified in keeping a containing force of Hutton's M.I. on his flank and rear while he pushed on with the rest of the cavalry, but the separation of the 1st and 4th Brigades throughout the day was unfortunate, and Pilcher's force contributed nothing to the success of the operations. On the other hand, French's rapid movements undoubtedly cleared the way for the easy march of the main column.

The Boer side.

On the Boer side, though Botha was certainly surprised by French's appearance on his right rear, he was able to secure his retreat by prolonging his line along the railway. But de Wet missed a great chance in not making more use of his strong position on Ian Hamilton's right rear for a counter-attack. The most probable explanation is that he was more anxious to hold open a retreat to the east for the Free State forces than to risk losing them in a last despairing effort to defend the Transvaal from invasion.

II

May 12–22. Halt at Kroonstad to enable supplies, etc., to come up.

When Lord Roberts arrived in Kroonstad his central column had marched over 130 miles in ten days,* and the right flank column, under Ian Hamilton, considerably more; and during half those days they had been actively engaged. During the ten days from May 12th to 22nd Lord Roberts kept his main body halted at Kroonstad, while he gave personal attention to various details connected with supplies. Some of his staff were anxious that he should leave such matters to subordinates, and push on at once; but he knew that the safety of his army depended on them, and that the time spent in seeing to them himself would not be wasted in the end. His first care was naturally for the repair of the railway line. Between Bloemfontein and Kroonstad there were seventeen different places where the line had been blown up by the Boers, the damage varying

* The distance from Bloemfontein to Kroonstad by railway is 128 miles. Even the Eleventh Division, which advanced straight along the railway, naturally covered more miles than this.

from the destruction of single culverts to that of considerable bridges or of continuous stretches of line 1,000 yards in length. Under Colonel Girouard's direction a repairing train fully equipped, in command of Lieutenant Micklem, followed up the march of the army, repairing the small breaks as it went, and leaving larger parties, consisting of infantry battalions or gangs of natives, to make good the more serious damage. The most important breaks were at the Vet, the Zand and the Valsch rivers, the bridges over which had been rendered useless. In each of these cases temporary low-level deviations were constructed with so much expedition that the Vet River could be crossed by the 13th May; railhead had been pushed up to the Zand River by the 17th, and the Zand and Valsch rivers had been bridged by the 23rd. The rapidity with which the army could be kept supplied naturally depended on its proximity to railhead. The process of unloading cases from the railway, loading them again on ox-wagons, from which, in turn, the mule-wagons accompanying the army were filled up, though carried out with all possible despatch, entailed delay; and the greater the distance to be covered by the slowly-moving ox-wagons the greater the delay. The main army was well supplied as far as Kroonstad; but the flank columns, like Hamilton's and Colvile's, became more and more difficult to reach, and were hardly ever on full rations. The cavalry also experienced the usual difficulty about horses, as there was no advanced depôt beyond Bloemfontein, and the remounts, on arriving at Kroonstad, were found to be of an inferior type and in bad condition.* The sick, too, again became a source of anxiety as soon as Kroonstad was reached. Kroonstad itself had a poor water supply and was badly drained; many men had started in a weak state from Bloemfontein, and though their enthusiasm had carried them thus far, they fell sick on arrival. It was indeed noticeable all through the campaign how quickly

* Of 334 horses issued to the 4th Cavalry Brigade, 21 had to be destroyed as incurable, 65 were sent to the sick depôt, and 26 were ordered rest before being able to march, while the 1st Cavalry Brigade had to leave 67 out of 396 remounts in Kroonstad when they marched forward. French and Hutton's commands were found to be reduced to 2,330 men altogether when they advanced from Kroonstad.

sickness developed among the troops when they were called upon to halt for even a day or two, whereas the hard and regular life on the march was accompanied with very little illness. As many of the sick as possible were sent down country, but many could not be moved, and the hospital accommodation again proved very inadequate. The staff on the spot, though most resourceful and energetic, were quite inadequate for the work they were called upon to perform, and the supply of necessaries and bedding was insufficient.

Meanwhile flank expedition carried out.

During his ten days' halt in Kroonstad Lord Roberts kept his flank columns busy. No better illustration of the elusive character of the Free State Boers and of their guerilla method can be found than in the history of Ian Hamilton's abortive expedition to Lindley and Heilbron.

Ian Hamilton ordered to Lindley and Heilbron.

Two days after the occupation of Kroonstad Lord Roberts ordered Ian Hamilton to clear the right flank by marching his column to Lindley * and thence up to Heilbron. He was, if possible, to capture President Steyn and the rest of the Free State Government, and to make provision for the civil government of those towns. The special instructions given to Ian Hamilton show to what extent Lord Roberts still misapprehended the temper of the Boers and the small impression made on them by his successes. All who surrendered their arms and ponies were to be allowed to return to their farms, while the removal of stock or crops was strictly forbidden, except of such as were actually necessary for the feeding of the troops. As had happened before in the south-east, the Boers surrendered none but old arms, and the crops and stock were left standing for the benefit of wandering commandos. After waiting two more days for supplies, which had to come sixty-eight miles by road from railhead at Vet River, Ian Hamilton marched by the lower road south of the Valsch to Tweepunt, twelve miles from Kroonstad, on the 16th. On the following day Broadwood hurried forward to Lindley, which was only garrisoned by fifty men, and captured it after a short skirmish. On the 18th Ian Hamilton moved in with Bruce Hamilton's brigade,

17th May. Occupies Lindley.

* The Boers, to mislead the English, had given out that Lindley was to be their next capital.

leaving Smith-Dorrien some miles behind to press forward a convoy expected from Kroonstad. At Lindley Piet de Wet offered to surrender with the Bethlehem commando, on condition that he was allowed to retire to his farm, but on Lord Roberts's order this condition was not granted * and the negotiations fell through.

Tactics of Free State commandos.

Meanwhile the Free State commandos were again beginning to show activity. Smith-Dorrien's outposts were constantly being fired at, but he could obtain no satisfaction when he sent out a stronger force against the aggressors. On the 20th, Ian Hamilton evacuated Lindley; at once the Boers, who had been waiting outside the town, re-occupied it and began firing at his outposts and rearguard. This was the beginning of a sort of hide-and-seek game, which lasted for a long time, in the stretch of country north of Lindley. When the English came up in sufficient strength to make themselves respected the Boer commandos disappeared in the hills, or contented themselves with pouncing down on an unfortunate flank or rearguard which was too much exposed. When they came in a sufficiently weak state, the Boers harassed and impeded almost every step they took.

22nd May. Ian Hamilton at Heilbron.

On this occasion Hamilton was able to impose a certain amount of respect with his large column, but even he did not escape without some losses. The rearguard, consisting of Bainbridge's M.I. and the 82nd Battery, was able to drive back the press of Boers, pursuing them out of Lindley, but the 5th M.I. on the right flank stayed too far behind and lost some forty men, twenty of whom were captured, before they could rejoin the main body, which all through the day was harassed on its way to the Rhenoster River.† On the 22nd the column arrived at Heilbron. Steyn and Christiaan de Wet had retreated thither from Kroonstad with a large part of their commandos, and had been joined by Prinsloo and Steenekamp, with the Heilbron commando from Van Reenen's Pass. But no attempt was made to defend the approaches to the

* Lord Roberts's reason for refusing was that he was unwilling to make any exception to his proclamation of March 15th, which laid down that, whereas the rank and file of Boers surrendering could return to their farms, leaders would have to become prisoners of war.

† Ian Hamilton's total casualties on this day were sixty.

new capital,* except by Piet de Wet's and Kolbe's waspish bands, who had been Ian Hamilton's assailants on his way from Lindley. As soon as news came of Hamilton's approach, Steyn drove off with the government papers towards Frankfort, followed shortly afterwards by Christiaan de Wet with his convoy. Prinsloo moved a few miles east of the town, and then marched south towards Lindley. As Ian Hamilton approached the town from the south de Wet's convoy of 200 wagons could be seen trekking slowly away on the other side, and Broadwood was sent in pursuit. He succeeded, however, in cutting off only fifteen wagons and seventeen prisoners.

Effect of Hamilton's march.

The sole result of this week's demonstration on the right flank was to make Botha apprehensive lest his position on the Rhenoster River should be turned, so on May 22nd, the day that Hamilton reached Heilbron, he gave it up without waiting for Lord Roberts to attack him. For any moral effect upon the country actually traversed, the demonstration was worse than useless. The hasty evacuation of Lindley two days after its occupation showed those Boers who were inclined to surrender that they could hope for no adequate protection from the English, and Colvile's task in getting to Lindley and Heilbron a week later was made no easier by Ian Hamilton's progress through them.

16th May. Hutton on left flank goes towards Bothaville.

On the left flank Hutton obtained leave to carry out a three-days' reconnaissance in the direction of Bothaville for the purpose of exploring the country, and of capturing some Boer leaders who were reported to have returned to their farms. On the 16th his two corps-commanders, Pilcher and Alderson, started on parallel roads, and between them they succeeded in capturing twenty-four prisoners, including a commandant and a field-cornet, besides a quantity of arms, wagons and horses. This expedition was smartly carried out, especially by Alderson, who travelled sixty-one miles in twenty-three hours, and arrived within twelve miles of Bothaville. It was found that on this side the farmers,

* Apparently a commando and a battery under Froneman were at first posted at Vechtkop, south of the town, but on Prinsloo's arrival they moved west to join Louis Botha on the Rhenoster River.

unlike those on the east, were very generally returning to their farms and settling down to peaceful occupations.

Boers make little use of the respite.

While Lord Roberts was busied with these matters the Boers had made no use of the respite afforded them to organize their resistance. The best men among them were as determined as ever to fight to the end, but they were very doubtful as to the proper way of setting about it; and the telegrams despatched to the various generals from Pretoria bear witness to the almost universal state of confusion and uncertainty which prevailed in all the commandos.

May 7–10. Last sitting of the Transvaal Volksraad.

Part of this time was taken up in the Transvaal by the last sittings ever held by the Volksraad. The session was opened on May 7. None of the pomp usual at these inaugural ceremonies was wanting. The consuls and attachés of the foreign powers attended in their uniforms. The aged President came with his scarf of office and the white gloves he wore on such occasions, and surrounded by his accustomed escort. The fine presence of Lukas Meyer, chairman of the First Volksraad, added dignity to the scene, and most of the living members answered to their names. But there were grim reminders of the death struggle in which the nation was engaged. The chairs in which Generals Joubert and Kock and the burghers Barnard and Tosen used to sit were empty save for streamers of crape and wreaths of immortelles, and the captured Cronje's chair was draped in the Vierkleur. The members were subdued and grave, and Mr. Bosman, the *predikant*, in his opening prayer, gave expression to their feelings of pride and sorrow for the heroes who had fallen. The President, in his inaugural speech, dwelt with warm appreciation on the help given by the sister-State and on the goodwill of foreign nations; he explained his policy in sending the deputation to Europe, and declared that the finances of the State were satisfactory. He also added a few informal words of confident trust that God would give them victory in the end, bade the burghers be of good courage, and touched in a pathetic outburst on his own loneliness since his old comrades, Joubert, Kock and Wolmarans, were gone. Beyond this the sittings, which lasted only three days, were of little account. An attempt was made by Kruger to

raise more money by the sale, at ridiculously low prices, of underground mining rights over which the proprietorship of the State was at least doubtful;* but the Volksraad was against him and he gave way. This resistance to the attempt of their domineering President to prejudice the rights of individuals, and to sell for a small sum a valuable asset of the State, was the last act of an independent Volksraad of the Transvaal, an act of good policy and of justice.

Decision not to make a stand at Pretoria.

The conduct of the war was left entirely in the hands of the administration, who had already decided not to stake the last hope of the nation on Pretoria. The uselessness of the four forts built at such great expense had long been known, and they had been deprived of all their artillery. Still, to calm the fears of the inhabitants some show of organizing the defence of the town was made, and Lukas Meyer was appointed commandant. But even in April vast stores of ammunition, of supplies, and of bullion had been sent to Machadodorp, and at the beginning of May the British agents in Delagoa Bay were aware that both Lydenburg and Machadodorp were being prepared for defence. Beyond these steps the government seem to have resigned themselves to the policy of waiting to see what Lord Roberts would do. A few vague measures were suggested, but came to nothing; an Amazon Corps was much talked of in Pretoria, and a few ladies had themselves photographed in riding skirts with rifles in their hands, but that was all. Proposals were also seriously entertained for blowing up the mines on the approach of Lord Roberts, and preparations were actually made for that purpose. But the protests of Louis Botha and other leaders prevented the government from giving official countenance to the scheme.

Free Staters prepare for guerilla war.

The Free State Boers seemed at first sight more hopelessly disorganized than those of the Transvaal, for they had already lost three capitals, and a considerable part of their country was occupied; but if anything, they were more

* The Bewaarplaatsen are areas on proclaimed mining ground on the surface of which mining companies have the right of dumping their refuse, but where they have no underground rights. The proposal was to sell these underground rights, which are of very great value.

forward in preparation for a serious resistance to British rule. Steyn and the government had retired to Frankfort, whence they could still communicate with the Transvaal and obtain supplies of ammunition. They had already made up their minds to fight no more battles, but to harass the enemy's communications. Lord Roberts's next step forward was to be the signal for these tactics to begin.

General results of Roberts's scheme so far successful, except for Buller.

It is at this point of the advance that the active co-operation of Buller's Natal army would have been invaluable to Lord Roberts. In other parts of the theatre of war his strategic scheme was working out admirably. On May 16 Hunter had crossed the Vaal and occupied Christiana; on the following day Mafeking had been relieved. Baden-Powell, Plumer, and Hunter were thus free to close on Pretoria from the west. Methuen was at Hoopstad ready to advance across the Vaal or to turn east to Kroonstad as Lord Roberts might determine; Warren had captured Douglas, and was driving the Griqualand rebels before him; and Carrington prevented any incursion of the Boers into Rhodesia. Colvile, Clements, Rundle, Kelly-Kenny and Chermside were sufficient to stop any invasion into the south-eastern Free State or Cape Colony. The one thing needful to make the circle round the Boers complete was Buller's presence at Vrede in the Free State. Once there he would have threatened Steyn's communications with the Transvaal, and would also have been in a position to make a rapid flank march towards the Delagoa Bay line.

General Buller had reached Dundee on May 16th, and Lord Roberts at once urged him to move over the passes to the west on Vrede. The Boers were strongly intrenched in front of him at Laing's Nek, but they would no doubt have evacuated it then as they did some weeks later when they found their position turned at Botha's Pass and Alleman's Nek. No representations, however—for Roberts would not resort to direct orders—could induce Buller to face the risk, although he had originally proposed a similar movement himself. He preferred to advance slowly and steadily through Natal, repairing the railway and bringing up

supplies. Again, therefore, Roberts had to give up all hope of co-operation from this quarter.

Roberts decides not to send Ian Hamilton on to Delagoa Bay line.

Failing General Buller's co-operation, the question presented itself to Lord Roberts whether he should attempt what should have been Buller's task with part of his own army. If Lord Roberts had detached part of his own army for this purpose, Ian Hamilton's was obviously the most suitable. But he did not feel justified in weakening his main army to that extent. There were still 170 miles from Kroonstad to Pretoria, and several positions on the way, which might be difficult to carry. The Boers, though retreating, were still unbroken, and were expected to concentrate nearly all their forces in defence of Johannesburg and the capital. The essence of Lord Roberts's plan was to advance in overwhelming force in the centre, and his 38,000 men would not be excessive, if the Boers opposed him seriously in advantageous positions of their own choice, and elected to defend their two chief towns in the Transvaal. It would undoubtedly have been of great assistance to him to find an English column on the Delagoa Bay railway when he arrived at Pretoria; and nobody realized that better than Lord Roberts himself. But if he is to be blamed for not carrying out this idea, it must be not because he kept Ian Hamilton near himself, but because he did not insist on his suggestion to Buller.

Changes made in Roberts's order of march.

A considerable change was, however, made in the order of march of his army. As far as Kroonstad he had treated the right flank of his advance as the more important. He knew that de Wet's forces were mainly on this side, and he was also anxious to secure Winburg as one of the bases for the troops left behind in the Free State. But after Kroonstad his main interest shifted to the left flank. In the first place, he considered that the Free State commandos, who had retired to the east from the Zand River and Kroonstad, could easily be kept in check by Colvile, Clements and Rundle, a belief which was strengthened by Hamilton's easy capture of Lindley and Heilbron. Secondly, his intelligence led him to imagine that the Transvaalers would make their first determined stand in defence of Johannesburg, west of

the main line of railway, and he was especially anxious to capture Johannesburg before any attempts to wreck the mines could be carried into effect. Accordingly, Hamilton was ordered to return to the railway after leaving Heilbron, and Methuen, who had a strong force of Yeomanry, to march north from Hoopstad and support French on the left flank. As a right flank guard he thought it would be sufficient to bring up Colvile with the Highland Brigade and a battalion of yeomanry to Heilbron, and to keep Gordon's cavalry brigade patrolling on the east of the railway. His anxiety for the safety of his long line of communications caused a further modification of his plans two days after he started north. Kroonstad itself had been left for two days without any troops, and then only one militia battalion without guns arrived as garrison. He therefore ordered Methuen thither to protect the railway, and Hamilton to make a further move westwards as the support for French and Hutton on the left flank. The transference of Ian Hamilton from the right to the left flank across the front of the central column was an awkward manœuvre, but Lord Roberts had little choice in the matter. In support of French he required a column well equipped with transport, with a large proportion of mounted men, and accustomed to act independently. Hamilton's column alone answered all these requirements, and the transference was so well timed and so well carried out that no confusion actually ensued. In the central column the order of march was to remain substantially as it had been on the way to Kroonstad. An advance guard composed of the 4th and 8th Corps M.I., with "J" Battery, Ross's Colt gun battery, and two companies of yeomanry, all under Colonel Henry, was to march on each side of the railway; the 3rd Cavalry Brigade were sent out on the right flank; and the Eleventh Division were to advance along the railway with the Seventh Division on their left.

III

From Kroonstad the advance through the remaining eighty-five miles of the Free State was unopposed. Roberts himself started on the 22nd. By the evening of the 23rd he had marched thirty-seven miles, and was opposite the Boer intrenchments on the Rhenoster River. French, with the 1st and 4th Cavalry Brigades, and Hutton's two corps of M.I., had been sent ahead on the 19th to cross a drift further west so as to place himself behind the Boers on the same day that Roberts was opposite them. But Botha, alarmed at Ian Hamilton's appearance at Heilbron on his left flank, had already evacuated the line of the Rhenoster and retreated across the Vaal in time to save all his rolling-stock, and to destroy the railway. French had become aware of Botha's retreat on the 22nd when he was still at Engelskuil; instead, therefore, of turning towards the railway he hurried forward to the drift over the Vaal at Parys. This haste was rewarded, for when he arrived there on the 24th, the Boers detailed to defend the drifts west of Vereeniging were still at Potchefstroom. Dickson's brigade was sent across the Vaal at Parys,* and secured Old Viljoen's Drift further up the river, where Porter's brigade crossed on the 24th, and Alderson's M.I. on the 25th. Pilcher, with the baggage, crossed higher up still at Lindeque Drift. On the same day Ian Hamilton had successfully crossed the railway in front of Lord Roberts, and his cavalry under Broadwood had occupied Boschbank Drift on the Vaal between Riet Spruit and Vereeniging. On the 26th French was ordered to drive away any opposition there might be to Ian Hamilton's crossing at Boschbank, and then occupy a position near Vereeniging. Crossing the Riet Spruit he came into touch with Broadwood, and drove away

May 22. Roberts leaves Kroonstad.

May 24. French reaches the Vaal.

* As an indication of the difficulties from insufficient information about the country under which this campaign was carried out, it may be of interest to note that General French had been led to expect by the Intelligence Department that he could take all his transport over the drift at Parys, whereas, in fact, it was so bad that only horses could pass over in single file, and they not without risk and difficulty.

some Boers lingering in the hills east of the spruit.* He then bivouacked at Rietkuil, eleven miles west of the railway, after sending Major Sprot with the Carabiniers to Vereeniging, and learning that it was already occupied by Henry. By that evening Ian Hamilton had brought the rest of his column across the Vaal.

May 26. Roberts's advance guard reaches Vereeniging.

Lord Roberts with the central column, which had been marching an average of sixteen miles a day since leaving Kroonstad, reached Taaibosch Spruit on the 26th. His advance guard of Henry's M.I. pushed on to Viljoen's Drift, where some of Botha's rearguard, chiefly foreigners, were found engaged in wrecking a store and holding a mine on the south bank. The mounted infantry drove these men out of the store and mine, but were not in time to prevent the last train from going over the bridge, which was blown up immediately afterwards. Henry then crossed at the drift and cleared some of the enemy out of a coal-mine they were holding on the north bank. "J" Battery came up and shelled the fugitives, and Vereeniging was occupied. Meanwhile, Pilkington, with the 2nd West Australians, had, by Pole-Carew's orders, reconnoitred Engelbrecht Drift east of the railway, and found it strongly occupied; so falling back along the south bank of the Vaal, he arrived at Viljoen's Drift in time to cross with Henry's M.I. Before leaving the Free State Lord Roberts issued a proclamation dated on the Queen's birthday, May 24th, formally incorporating that State in her dominions under the name of the Orange River Colony.

Orange Free State annexed.

Country before Lord Roberts.

On the 27th Lord Roberts's infantry crossed by Viljoen's Drift. The country now before him was a welcome change from the monotonous plains in the centre of the Free State. From the level of the Vaal the country slopes up gradually for a short distance, and then becomes intersected with considerable ridges and deep valleys, as far as Johannesburg on the Witwatersrand. West of the railway the Gatsrand and

* The only fight of the day was as the result of a dashing charge of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, under Majors Robin and Cradock, on to a ridge held by forty or fifty Boers; the Boers lost 5 killed, several wounded and 5 prisoners, including their field-cornet.

the Doornkop and Klipriviersberg ranges offer the best defensive positions.* The actual line of railway goes through comparatively level country, but east of it again the hills stretching to Heidelberg and beyond are formidable.

Botha retires to Klip River Station. His reinforcements.

The rapidity of Lord Roberts's movements from Kroonstad had not left the Boers much time to gather themselves together for another stand, and some of the reinforcements they were expecting had not arrived until a day or two after the English had crossed the Vaal. When Botha entered the Transvaal on his retreat from Rhenoster River, he left behind all the Free State forces, and sent the Wakkerstroom commando back to Laing's Nek, as they had shown signs of insubordination and were thought likely to fight with more alacrity in their own district. But the reinforcements that hurried up from other parts of the Transvaal soon more than made good these losses. Viljoen's strong Johannesburg commando and Dirksen's Boksburg detachment had been summoned from Natal, and the relief of Mafeking had set free all the commandos that had been sitting there so stolidly. Botha first halted his own force at Vereeniging, but finding that the open country offered no good defensive position he detached a force of 300 or 400 to guard Engelbrecht Drift, where he expected Hamilton to cross, and a few foreigners to delay the English advance at Viljoen's Drift, and fell back on the 25th with his main body to Meyerton Station. Here some intrenchments had been hastily thrown up under the direction of Major Erasmus. Notwithstanding this, on the 27th Botha retired still further north to Klip River Station. Grobler and Lemmer had already brought the first contingent of burghers from Mafeking, drawn from the Marico and Waterberg commandos, down to the Vaal, whence they had been driven up into the Gatsrand by French. Here, in the neighbourhood of Faraosfontein, Viljoen was sent to join them on the 27th.

May 27. Operations at Engelbrecht Drift on Roberts's right flank

Lord Roberts himself had crossed the Vaal without opposition on the 27th, but his two flanks were engaged. Gordon was sent from the south of the river to attempt a

* For a fuller description of all the country west of Pretoria, see ch. x., p. 346.

crossing at Engelbrecht Drift, and Henry along the north bank to co-operate with him. Gordon found the Drift in possession of the Boers, and being anxious to avoid dragging his guns through the sandy roads thither, contented himself with a small cavalry demonstration, and without waiting for Henry took his brigade over the Vaal at Vereeniging. Henry, who had equally sandy roads to march over, arrived subsequently and drove the Boers from the drift. On the left French and Hutton were ordered to clear Lord Roberts's flank as far as a point slightly north-west of Klip River Station, and Hamilton to advance to a position six miles south of French. After about two hours' march French found some Boers, who belonged to Lemmer's commando, holding a spur of the Gatsrand, north-east of the road. After brushing these aside he sent forward Porter's brigade to secure Vlakfontein farm, just south of a nek over the Gatsrand. Porter drove off an attack by Viljoen's men on his flank, and made them withdraw to the Klipriviersberg, but Grobler's men, who were holding the hills on each side of the pass, were more difficult to move. After occupying Vlakfontein farm Porter secured the hill to the north-east, with the help of "T" Battery, but the Inniskillings, who were sent against the north-western hill, were too weak to force the position. On a renewed attempt, when the 4th Cavalry Brigade arrived, the 7th Dragoon Guards succeeded in gaining a point on the ridge, but at nightfall the Boer rearguard was still in occupation of the western heights, which commanded the track leading over the nek, nor did Grobler finally vacate the position and retire north, until a further reinforcement of the 1st Battalion M.I. had been sent up by Hutton at midnight. The day had been long for the cavalry, who had travelled thirty miles, and had then been engaged with the enemy's rearguard from 5 P.M. till late into the night. Ian Hamilton, whose way had been cleared for him by French, arrived at his appointed position at Wildebeestfontein, after a march of twenty-three miles.

and west of Klip River Station by French and Hutton.

On the 28th and 29th May Lord Roberts drew his lines closer round Johannesburg. The idea was that French on the

left flank should describe a circuit to the north of the town, and Hamilton advance direct to Florida on the west. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade on the right was to perform a similar manœuvre to French's, and cut the lines to Springs and to Pretoria, while the centre was to advance on Germiston, the junction for the Cape and Natal lines to Pretoria. Roberts's plan for surrounding Johannesburg.

On the 28th Roberts occupied Klip River Station without opposition, and Gordon came up on his right. Botha had again retired, and had finally determined to concentrate his main defence of Johannesburg on the Klipriviersberg ridge, which forms an outwork to the Witwatersrand extending from Natal Spruit Station westwards to Doornkop, south of Roodepoort. The front of the position chosen was protected by the Klip River, which follows the foot of the ridge from Doornkop almost to the railway. Though not a deep stream it spreads out into marshes and swamps likely to impede considerably the deployment of troops, and rendering it impassable except at the crossings. These were at the drift above Klip Riviers Oog, across which the Potchefstroom road passes, at a bridge six miles further east near Van Wyk's Rust, where the road through the Gatsrand comes in from the south, and nearer the railway at Jackson's Drift, which the main road from Vereeniging crosses. Between the two more westerly drifts the ridge takes a bend northwards, and is intersected by the Klip Spruit, another marshy stream, which falls into the Klip River at Van Wyk's Rust. The decision to hold the Klipriviersberg was probably the best that could be made under the circumstances, for while Botha had little hope of actually preventing Lord Roberts from entering Johannesburg, the position chosen was so strong that he might very reasonably reckon on holding back French and Hamilton for some time, even if he did not succeed in defeating them. The omens of victory were also on his side, for in this neighbourhood Jameson's expedition came to a summary end in 1896. Here, therefore, Botha placed most of his forces, including the important reinforcements he received on the morning of the 28th. Botha concentrates at Klipriviersberg. Approaches to Klipriviersberg.

De la Rey with 600 men, and Steenekamp with the Rustenburg commando, who had just arrived from Mafeking, May 28. Boer dispositions.

were placed on Doornkop. Von Dalwig, also from Mafeking, distributed his seven guns along a front of about seven or eight miles east of Doornkop. Most of Botha's own commandos, Viljoen's Johannesburgers, and Grobler's and Lemmer's men from Mafeking, were on the slope of the Klipriviersberg east of Klip Spruit, and on the part opposite Jackson's Drift. Thus, except for the Boksburg commando, under Dirksen, guarding the line to Springs, and the Heidelberg and Elandsfontein commandos under Weilbach holding Natal Spruit, Botha had concentrated all the burghers under his immediate command on the Klipriviersberg and Doornkop. The numbers are somewhat difficult to estimate. Properly, he should have had about 6,000, but he can scarcely have mustered half that number. The proximity of Johannesburg seems to have proved too tempting to many of the burghers and foreigners, who went in there on the plea of getting stores, and stayed for various purposes, which seemed more attractive than another defeat. Indeed, Viljoen states that his own commando, which should have consisted of 450 men, was reduced to 60 from this cause, and though he probably under-estimates his numbers, the shrinkage must have been very considerable.

French crosses the Klip River and attacks.

French, descending from the Gatsrand on the morning of the 28th, was thus faced by the Boers occupying a strong position between him and the Witwatersrand with only two crossing-places, six miles apart, by which he could cross the Klip River to attack them. Having been ordered by Lord Roberts first to occupy Rietfontein, just south of the river, he determined to make good his position there by a direct attack on the Boers in front of him, although his force was small, and the country ill-adapted for such an attempt by cavalry. After securing the bridge and the hamlet of Van Wyk's Rust with the 4th Cavalry Brigade, he sent the 1st Cavalry Brigade, under Porter, and Alderson's M.I. over the river. Alderson, with the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles, seized a low ridge just north of the bridge. Porter's brigade, and Hutton with the rest of Alderson's corps, advanced about three miles further to another ridge immediately east of the Klip Spruit, within 2,000 yards

of the Boer position. This ridge was like a wedge driven into the middle of the position here occupied by the Boers, but it was exposed to flanking fire from the Boer guns on Doornkop and the western slopes of Klipriviersberg, and to musketry fire from the intervening ridges. South of the river the 5th and 7th corps of M.I. had been sent forward by Ian Hamilton to hold the Gatsrand between Vlakfontein Nek and Allewyn's Poort, opposite Jackson's Drift, thus securing French's right flank from attack, and, as the bridge at Van Wyk's Rust was adequately protected by Alderson on the north bank, French sent Dickson's brigade and Pilcher's M.I. six miles up the river to cross at the Potchefstroom road drift. The idea of this movement was for Dickson to make a converging attack on the Boer centre. The crossing was safely effected, and Pilcher was left in occupation of a kopje which commanded the drift. But Dickson's converging attack was a failure. He advanced towards the ridge in the centre held by Porter and Hutton, but to reach it was obliged to march across open ground, and over the swamps formed by the Klip Spruit, fully exposed to the fire from Doornkop. With surprisingly few casualties, considering the fire directed upon the brigade and the confusion into which it was thrown, he reached the friendly ridge, which had the sole merit of giving good cover to the troops collected upon it.

French retires in the evening.

But the occupation of this ridge gave no other advantage, while an advance by cavalry against the Boer centre under a converging fire from both flanks was obviously out of the question. French therefore determined to withdraw to the south of the Klip River under cover of darkness, and attempt on the following day to turn the Boer right. On Hutton's representation, however, he provided against a counter attack from the Boers by leaving Alderson and Pilcher on the kopjes they were holding to the north of the river, and some New Zealanders on the ridge east of Klip Spruit.

May 29. French proposes to attack Boer right on Doornkop.

Next day French set out with the 1st and 4th Cavalry Brigades from Van Wyk's Rust along the southern bank of the Klip River to the drift which Pilcher had been holding all through the night. His intention was to make another attempt to pierce the Boer position in front of the Wit-

watersrand, this time by an attack on Doornkop, where the right of their line rested. After crossing to the left bank of the river at the Potchefstroom road drift, he sent Dickson and Porter to seize two kopjes between the road and Doornkop. Both succeeded, Porter without difficulty, and Dickson after a fight in which the 7th Dragoons and 14th Hussars distinguished themselves. But neither of them was able to advance further against Von Dalwig's superior artillery fire.

Ian Hamilton comes up, and decides to attack in front, while French takes Doornkop in flank.

At this juncture Ian Hamilton arrived on the scene. The 5th and 7th M.I. Corps had been withdrawn from the Gatsrand and had rejoined his main body, which had marched ten miles on the 28th, from Wildebeestfontein to Cyferfontein, and arrived at the drift about 1 o'clock on the 29th. French and Hamilton then had a conference to decide on the plan of action. French proposed that both forces should unite to make a wide turning movement by the right bank of the Klip River, so as to avoid Doornkop altogether. But Ian Hamilton favoured a direct attack by his own force; he had no more supplies left and his men were tired and footsore, so that it was urgent for him to reach Florida by the shortest way; he was unwilling to pass round so strong a force of Boers, when there was a chance of holding them to their position and defeating them by a strong infantry attack in front, in combination with a flank attack by the cavalry; lastly, the thought of Jameson's surrender appealed to him as an additional reason for turning the tables on the Boers on the same spot. In the end it was decided that Ian Hamilton should make the direct attack, while French, to whom Hamilton lent Broadwood's cavalry brigade besides Legge's and de Lisle's M.I. Corps, should go round Doornkop. At two o'clock French recrossed the drift and started in a north-westerly direction.

Arrangements made at Van Wyk's Rust.

Ian Hamilton had previously left Bainbridge with the 7th M.I. Corps at the Van Wyk's Rust Bridge, so as to enable Alderson to rejoin French and Hutton. The New Zealanders had retired without difficulty from the ridge east of Klip Spruit in the early morning, but when Alderson began leaving his position north of the bridge he was hard pressed by the Boers on the Klipriviersberg. Leaving their

LIEUT.-COLONEL E. A. H. ALDERSON.
COMMANDING 1ST CORPS, MOUNTED INFANTRY.
Photo by Knight, Aldershot.

MAJOR-GENERAL H. L. SMITH-DORRIEN, D.S.O.
COMMANDING 19TH BRIGADE.
Photo by J. T. Newman, Berkhamsted.

shelter on the hills they came boldly forward against him, but Alderson, who had conducted a retirement under somewhat similar circumstances at Sannah's Post, kept them off by his skilful disposition of successive rearguards. He was thus enabled to cross the bridge with very slight loss. He then hastened after French and Hutton. Bainbridge's M.I. had given him some support from the south of the river, and subsequently re-occupied his position on the north to keep in check the Boers east of Klip Spruit. The only other troops between Ian Hamilton and the railway were Pilkington's West Australians, who had been sent by Pole-Carew to his own left flank and were holding the crossing at Jackson's Drift.

Difficulty of Ian Hamilton's task.

The Boers on the Klipriviersberg, who had faced French on the 28th, were no longer dangerous, as they could not pass Bainbridge on the south or the marshy Klip Spruit on the west; but the position in front of Ian Hamilton looked almost equally difficult to attack as that facing French on the previous day. From Doornkop across to Klip Spruit, it extended for five or six miles along rocky ridges, from which the ground sloped down to Ian Hamilton's position in a smooth glacis; the grass in front of the ridges had been burnt so as to remove any vestige of cover, and to show up khaki uniforms against the blackness. The Boer right on Doornkop was well thrown back; their left projected forward to a spur, against the English right centre. Besides the guns on the Doornkop ridge, there was a long-range gun on the main Witwatersrand ridge.

His plan of attack.

Ian Hamilton came to the conclusion that Doornkop itself might be left out of account in his attack. The Boers holding it appeared to be too far back to menace him seriously, the more so as they would be well occupied in attending to French's flank movement; he also considered that the line of his two infantry brigades would be too thin if he deployed them so far west. Accordingly he determined to concentrate his attack on the centre and left of the Boers in front of him. He had left his baggage south of the river at Rietfontein in charge of the Shropshire Light Infantry and part of the 5th M.I. Corps. The rest of the infantry were occupying the kopjes vacated by Porter and Dickson, the 21st brigade

on the left with the 76th battery and the 19th on the right with the 74th. As column reserve in the centre Ian Hamilton had the Sussex, Marshall's Horse and the 82nd battery. The 81st battery and the two 5-inch guns were behind the 19th brigade, and to their right the 5th battalion M.I. were close to the Klip Spruit.

The battle of Doornkop.

At 2.30 P.M., the infantry, after a short rest behind the sheltering kopjes, deployed for the attack. The 21st brigade, having furthest to go, started first, the C.I.V. leading, with the Derbys covering their left flank and rear and the Camerons in support. The Gordons and Canadians of the 19th brigade prolonged the right of the front line, and the Cornwalls came behind the Gordons. The artillery were quite rightly not allowed to disclose the position by opening fire before the infantry had started, but even after that they held back their fire unnecessarily long and ceased too soon. Consequently the battle was almost entirely confined to the infantry. At first the extension between ranks was twenty or thirty paces; subsequently the men were drawn in to intervals of ten paces. The gap between the two brigades soon became widened, partly because the battalions tended to close in away from one another, partly because Bruce Hamilton, being troubled on his left flank, kept edging rather too far west in order to master the fire from Doornkop. Smith-Dorrien, who was acting as divisional general for the infantry, accordingly ordered him to bear more to his front. The change of direction was very skilfully effected by the main body of C.I.V., three of their companies having been left to hold a kopje on the left flank near the Derbys. Meanwhile the Gordons and Canadians were in their turn edging too much to the right To remedy this Smith-Dorrien ordered a company of the Gordons from the rear to the left of their line,* and Ian Hamilton sent the whole of his reserve, consisting of the Sussex, Marshall's Horse and the 82nd battery, into the firing line, to fill up the gap between the two brigades. Then the C.I.V., Sussex, Gordons and Canadians and the 5th

* Captain Higginson, Spens's brigade-major, who carried the order to the Gordons, displayed great gallantry and coolness in cantering along their line until he found their colonel to give him the order.

battalion M.I. on the extreme right, advanced in one long line to the attack. Along the whole front the attack was pushed home in a magnificent spirit, but the brunt of the fighting fell to the C.I.V. and to six companies of the Gordons who were facing the projecting spur on the left. The C.I.V. had some cover, of which they had been trained to make full use, and the line of Boers in front of them was thinner, so that though equally well carried out, their advance was not so difficult or so costly as that of the Gordons.

The charge of the 1st Gordons

From the start, the Gordons, commanded by Colonel Forbes Macbean, had not had a vestige of cover, but for the first mile and a half their casualties had not been great. When they were at 800 yards' distance from the ridge the Boers began to pour out their heaviest fire. The Gordons then changed their slow swaggering pace for the double, being exposed for every step of the way to the well-aimed fire of the Boers, who were safely hidden behind their rocks. At last, just before the top of the ridge, they whipped out their bayonets, and rushed the position. By that time the Boers had already fled, but only to some other rocks two hundred yards further back. The Gordons waited for nearly half an hour in the first position to regain breath and gather together the ranks thrown into some confusion by the charge. Here they suffered most of their losses, for the cover from the north was not good, and they were exposed to gun fire as well as to furious volleys of musketry at two hundred yards' distance. Besides, they had no assistance from the English guns, which had ceased fire. But when the Boers saw them coming out again with fixed bayonets to drive them from their last lair, they fled at once. Only six companies of the Gordons were engaged in this charge, as two companies had become separated from the rest and were with the Canadians, who had less opposition. In these six companies the loss was very considerable. Lieutenant-Colonel Burney, second in command, was severely wounded, 7 other officers wounded, one killed; 20 men killed and 77 wounded. It was now dusk, and after a few enfilading shots from the Gordons on some 400 Boers who were facing towards Bruce Hamilton's Brigade, the last Boers fled

and the ridge was won. Ian Hamilton rode up to the Gordons, told them in a few fiery words how proud he was of the regiment to which his own father had belonged and in which he himself was born, then ordered the troops to bivouac on the ridge.

Since this fine advance of the Gordons critics have suggested that it was an unnecessary loss of life, and that the position could have been turned at less sacrifice. Even as to the fact, it is rather doubtful if this criticism has any grounds. The whole ridge had to be captured, and if the Boers opposite the Gordons had not been kept so busy, they would have had more leisure to enfilade the C.I.V. and the Canadians. Further, though it is certainly one of a general's duties to avoid loss of life if by doing so he can gain his object of defeating the enemy, the nation is certainly lost whose generals are inclined to consider too carefully on the field of battle how far, by avoiding a direct attack and circumventing the enemy's fire, loss of life may be diminished. Under the circumstances the attack was no doubt necessary. Even if it had not been so, it would not have been wasted, for the steady enduring discipline of the men under fire, their absolute indifference to losses, contributed to carry on the glorious traditions of the British infantry.

Typical of British infantry work.

Indeed, the advance of the Gordons on that day deserves to live in the annals of warfare, and none the less because unlike a short charge of cavalry, such an advance has none of the exhilarating sense of rapid motion which helps men to forget the danger. It is made by rushes, against an enemy whom you cannot see; bullets, coming from you don't know where, strike right and left of you, in front of you and behind you, falling like a visitation of God, which it is hopeless to resist. But it is just in these advances that the real greatness of the British soldier shows itself. He is not excitable, and is rarely possessed by the wild frenzy of battle which flares up and burns itself out. His courage is of the steady dogged sort which takes fighting and death in the day's work, no more and no less important than the food with which he keeps himself alive. It is this spirit which, in spite of all our mistakes, in spite of all our unpreparedness, made us win

GENERAL LOUIS BOTHA.

Photo by Duffus Bros., Cape Town.

in this long weary war. The men who came out in October, 1899, were some of them still fighting in just the same way in May 1902, when peace was at last signed; fighting, not brilliantly, but always in a uniformly dogged way. This advance of the Gordons is a notable type, but no more than a type, of the solid work which the British infantryman was quietly performing for nearly three years in South Africa.*

French gets beyond Doornkop on the left flank.

During the afternoon French's turning movement to the west had, as was expected, considerably lightened the pressure on Ian Hamilton's front; for the Boers had been sending men to Doornkop to cover their right flank, and French found all the ridges along the Klip River occupied. When he came up on a level with Doornkop he cleared the Boers thence and from the hills west of the Klip River, driving them up to the railway about the same time as Ian Hamilton gained possession of the rest of the ridge. After that some skirmishing took place with a Boer rearguard at Roodepoort, and a Boer commandant was captured. That night French and Hutton bivouacked on a farm to the north-west of Doornkop.

In Roberts's column Henry has fighting on the railway.

Further east, almost the only fighting fell to Henry's M.I. Setting out early in the morning they came upon some of Weilbach's men with guns at Natal Spruit Station. While "J" Battery and some of the M.I. were engaged with these, a train came up from the Natal line, and Lumsden's Horse were sent across a bend in the line to cut it off. This they were unable to do, but Lieutenant Pugh and a small party, while under fire, blocked the line against further traffic. Henry left "J" Battery and an escort at Natal Spruit, and Lumsden's Horse with Ross's Colt battery at

* In the Army List the 48th (Highlanders) of Toronto now appear as the "Allied Regiment of Canadian Militia" to the Gordons. This alliance is due to the comradeship which had originally sprung up between the Canadian Regiment and the Gordons at Paardeberg, and which was further cemented by the enthusiasm aroused in the Canadians as they witnessed this charge of the Gordons. The Canadian regiment itself was made up from various units of the Canadian militia, and ceased to have any existence as a whole after the war. But the 48th Highlanders of Toronto, who had contributed a comparatively large proportion of men to the regiment, subsequently obtained the coveted honour of alliance with the Gordons.

Elsburg, then pressed on with the remainder of his force to Germiston. Finding this place too strongly held, he turned aside to Boksburg, where he left a party of Loch's Horse in possession, then with the Leicestershire company of Yeomanry and a few of Lumsden's Horse, went on to a point further north which commanded the Pretoria line. After another running fight with a train carrying off a Long Tom to Pretoria, he prevented the escape of the seven engines and 200 trucks still left in Germiston by cutting the railway line.

He and Gordon reach a point north of Germiston.

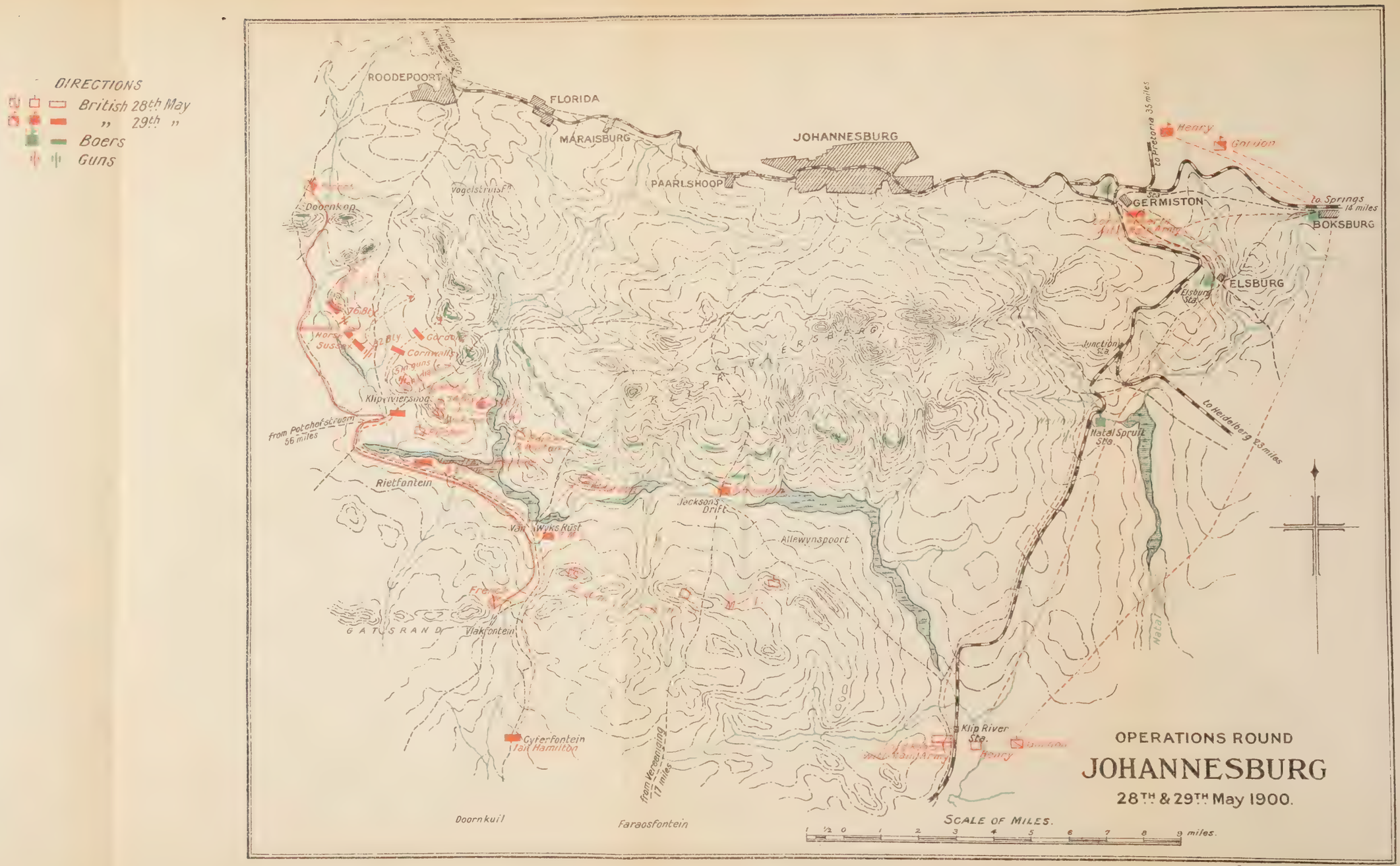
Gordon had been taking a somewhat wider turning movement. He also cut the Natal line and passed through Boksburg, after sending a detachment towards Springs, and finally came to a halt on the railway north of Germiston.

Infantry occupy Germiston.

The Eleventh Division arrived at Germiston about 4 P.M., and occupied the town and station after a slight skirmish with a Boer rearguard holding some slag heaps near the mines. The baggage and guns had been delayed at Klip River by the breakdown of a trunk and trestle bridge, but by the evening the whole of Lord Roberts's column was encamped round Germiston.

May 30. Circle round Johannesburg completed.

On the 30th May the circle round Johannesburg was completed. Gordon drove off an attack on his camp near Germiston with a loss of three officers and four men wounded, then advanced to the dynamite factory north of Johannesburg, where he entered into heliographic communication with General French. The Eleventh Division remained at Germiston, and Tucker moved the Seventh Division to a hill one and a half miles north-east of Johannesburg. Hamilton occupied Florida on the west, where he obtained some much-needed supplies partly in the village, partly in a captured train from Potchefstroom. French and Hutton marched along the railway through Florida and Roodepoort, blew up a culvert to prevent any more trains coming from Potchefstroom to Johannesburg, then turned in a north-easterly direction. As the column was descending into the plain below the Witwatersrand, a party of Boers with guns and wagons were seen about five miles off, escaping towards Pretoria. The 4th Brigade were at this time committed



Spottiswoode & Co Ltd. Lith. London

to a rocky path down the Rand, which was so bad as to hamper their movements very considerably, and the 1st Brigade were some way behind, waiting to hear the result of a reconnaissance sent out to the north-west. But Hutton, who had found a good road, obtained French's permission to cut off the Boers without waiting for the cavalry. Sending Alderson with the 1st Corps to circumvent the fugitives, and pursuing them in a direct line with Pilcher's 3rd Corps supported by "G" Battery and the New Zealanders, he was rewarded for his enterprise by the capture, after a sharp skirmish, of a 3-inch Creusot gun, an ammunition wagon, twelve loaded supply wagons, and fifty-four prisoners, including Commandant Runck of the German legion. This was one of the few occasions during the war in which mounted troops succeeded in making a capture after a direct pursuit, and even this capture, brilliantly as it was effected, was to some extent due to the circumstance that Runck had lost his habitual smartness as the result of a convivial meeting in Johannesburg. On that evening French was at Klipfontein due north of Johannesburg, and ten miles west of Gordon.

Roberts demands surrender of the town.

Meanwhile, early on the morning of this day Lord Roberts had sent Major Davies of the Grenadier Guards to demand the surrender of Johannesburg. On his arrival Dr. Krause, the commandant, had immediately agreed to drive out with Mr. Jan Meyer, the Volksraad member for Heidelberg, to discuss the matter with Lord Roberts.

State of Johannesburg since the beginning of the war.

Since the beginning of the war Johannesburg had lost half its population. The normal proportion of inhabitants in peace time was about one-third Dutch to two-thirds Uitlander, and of the Uitlanders the greater number were English. Most of these had either voluntarily left the town before the outbreak of hostilities or had been sent out by the Transvaal Government; of the remainder some had been left, with the sanction of the government, by different firms to take charge of their interests; while others had succeeded in evading the expulsion decree. Besides these there was a considerable population left in the town of poor Dutch people and of nondescript foreigners, chiefly congregated

in the suburb of Vrededorp. Consequently a large proportion of the normal inhabitants still left in Johannesburg were either very poor or very rascally.

Creditable at first.

Considering the character of a large part of the cosmopolitan loafers, the state of the town was on the whole very creditable during the early part of the war. Commandant Schutte was at first put in charge, and, though in some respects complaints were made against him, he kept very fair order. Under the stringent provisions of martial law all the bars were closed, the horses of the tramcars and cabs were requisitioned for military purposes, and the inhabitants were obliged to keep within doors at night. The regular police were at the beginning called to the front, and the white men left in the town, with the exception of British subjects, were called up for police duties; but the most efficient force was one privately enrolled by the mine-owners for the protection of their property. These precautions kept the looting down to very modest proportions.

Usefulness of Johannesburg to the Transvaal Government.

The government at Pretoria had no particular love for Johannesburg, which had always been regarded as a centre of disaffection, and as more of an English than a Boer town. But during the first seven months of the war it was found of considerable use. In October great quantities of bar gold had been commandeered from the various banks, and several of the mines were taken over and worked by the government. An ammunition factory was also started. Having no arsenal of their own, the government took over the engineering workshops of the English firm of Begbie for the purpose. This factory, which was put in charge first of a Belgian engineer, Leon, and subsequently, when Leon was wounded at Kimberley, of two Frenchmen, Gruenberg and Barron, representatives of Schneider's Creusot firm, issued altogether 20,000 rounds for Armstrong and Krupp 75 mm. guns, and 6,000 rounds for the Maxim-Nordenfeldts.

The Begbie explosion on April 24.

But on April 24th this source of supply was stopped by an explosion which not only wrecked the factory but spread destruction over a large number of the surrounding houses inhabited by the poor Dutch. The explosion was immediately put down to the agency of English conspirators, although

there is not the slightest evidence for this. Excited public meetings were held by the foreign workmen in the factory, who called for the immediate expulsion of the remaining British citizens, for the dismissal of Commandant Schutte, who was thought to have taken insufficient precautions, and for the formation of a special guard for the government workmen. All three demands were agreed to by the government, the guard was enrolled under Commandant Ricchiardi, an Italian volunteer, Schutte was replaced by Dr. Krause, and on April 30th all the remaining British subjects in the Transvaal, with a very few exceptions, were summarily expelled.

Danger to the mines.

Krause entered into office when affairs were getting most critical, and exercised his very difficult functions with much tact. With Lord Roberts's steady advance the chances of Johannesburg remaining Dutch grew very small, and the disorderly elements in the town were meanwhile quite prepared to get what booty they could and wreak destruction on everything else. But a more serious danger was that the government, or at any rate certain members of it, might allow the mines to be blown up before the English could prevent it. The State mining engineer Munnik had made everything ready for the purpose, as he admitted in open court, and the State Secretary Reitz was probably privy to the project. How far President Kruger and the other members of the government sanctioned it is a more doubtful question, but, at any rate, General Botha told them most distinctly that if any such attempt were made he would immediately lay down the command. As a matter of fact, in spite of elaborate police precautions, some of the mines had a narrow escape. During the night of the 28th Dr. Krause had tried to avoid trouble by sending all armed men south of the town; but some of the Germans held a secret meeting at the Grand Hotel, where Judge Kock announced that he was authorized by the government to have the mines blown up. Next morning two German adventurers, Baron von Maltzahn and Lieutenant Rennebarth, with a few associates, actually took a wagon full of dynamite to the Robinson mine, but during a moment's hesitation, due

to the absence of any written authority from the government, Commandant Runck came up and stopped the proceedings. Although the mines were thus saved, there was a good deal of looting of stores during these last few days of the Boer régime, and when Major Davies arrived the town was full of burghers helping themselves freely to other people's property on their way further north.

Dr. Krause surrenders the town.

When Dr. Krause met Lord Roberts he offered the unconditional surrender of the town, but represented that if the army tried to take possession before the armed burghers had left there would inevitably be street-fighting, which might result in serious destruction of property and even in danger to women and children. Accordingly, Lord Roberts agreed not to make any attack on the town or to enter it until 10 A.M. on the 31st, while Dr. Krause, on his side, agreed to safeguard the mines and to hasten the departure of all armed burghers.

May 31. Roberts occupies Johannesburg.

Next day, 31st May, Lord Roberts made his solemn entry into Johannesburg, the Vierkleur was hauled down from the flagstaff in front of the courthouse, and the silken Union Jack worked by Lady Roberts was run up in its place; the Seventh and Eleventh Divisions, with their artillery and the naval guns, marched past the Commander-in-Chief and three cheers were given for Queen Victoria. But the golden city looked most forlorn and dilapidated; windows and doors were closed and heavily barred; grass was growing in the streets of the principal suburbs, and in the main city the motley crowd of white foreigners and blacks gave little appearance of animation. Krause had kept his promise; except for a small guard at the fort, the crowds of armed men who had been passing through the day before had vanished, and above all, the mines were intact. Lord Roberts has been blamed for not pressing his advantage on the 30th by closing in on the city while there was a chance of capturing a good many prisoners with guns and wagons. But his decision to wait a day was undoubtedly right; he might have made some captures, but he would have risked, for the chance of a few hundred prisoners at most, some troublesome street-fighting and a very considerable danger to the mines.

By this time Lord Roberts's thin line of communications had become dangerously long. From Bloemfontein to Johannesburg there were 263 miles of railway to guard, and although the line between Johannesburg and Vereeniging was found to be uninjured,* railhead had not been brought beyond Rhenoster River on the other side of the Vaal. Already, too, the ominous activity of the Boers in the north-eastern Free State against Colvile and the yeomanry at Lindley pointed to the possibility of serious attacks on the railway. Provisions were, indeed, found in Johannesburg, but they would not have kept the army for long if the supply from the coast had become seriously interrupted. And every additional mile of communication made the danger greater. For this reason some, even, of Lord Roberts's boldest generals urged him to stay in Johannesburg for the present, and not advance the further forty miles to Pretoria.

Roberts urged not to advance beyond Johannesburg.

But Lord Roberts determined to go on. He thought it worth risking a good deal to capture Pretoria before the demoralized Boers had time to rally for its defence or to make arrangements for removing the 5,000 English prisoners.

Roberts decides to go on.

In his pleasant headquarters at Orange Grove, a suburb north of Johannesburg, which faces the great Magaliesberg range beyond Pretoria, he waited over the 1st and 2nd June. During this time supplies were being collected. He also established a provisional government in Johannesburg, leaving there his two principal intelligence officers, Lieutenant-Colonel Mackenzie of the Seaforths as military governor and Major Davies of the Grenadiers as Chief of the Police, and Wavell's brigade as garrison. Then on June 3 he again started north.

Arranges for supplies, etc.

By the 2nd June Lord Roberts's army had been drawn in closer for the move forward: Ian Hamilton was at Braamfontein, the western suburb of Johannesburg, French and Hutton at Bergvley, due north of the town, Gordon still at Modderfontein; nearer the town Henry was at Cyferfontein,

* The fact that the railway in the Transvaal belonged to the Hollander railway officials, who had shown great skill in destroying the Free State line, may account to some extent for its immunity from damage.

and Pole-Carew and Tucker* on the Yokeskei River. The Corps Artillery was reinforced by the arrival of a portion of the siege train, including four 6-inch howitzers under command of Major R. H. Allen, and the two recently purchased Austrian 9·45-inch howitzers. These siege howitzers had been hurried up from Bloemfontein in view of the possible necessity of bombarding the forts around Pretoria, and arrived on June 2 at Johannesburg, escorted by the 1st Battalion Suffolk Regiment, and the 25th and 69th Companies of Imperial Yeomanry.

Boer Government leave Pretoria after making arrangements to delay Roberts.

But the Boers had no intention of defending Pretoria seriously. On the 29th May President Kruger had decided, at an executive council meeting, to leave Pretoria on the 30th, and take with him to Middelburg the official archives and all available funds. General Meyer was ordered to dismantle all the forts and to remove the few guns they still contained. The Burgomaster, Piet Potgieter, was charged with the duty of preserving life and property until Lord Roberts's arrival, and then to hand over the town to him. A message was left for General Botha to arrange for the evacuation of the town, and to delay the British advance as long as possible, but on no account to allow the Transvaal forces to be seriously engaged. On the 3rd June Botha arrived and disposed the forces, such as were left to him, in accordance with these instructions. They now numbered no more than 1,500 to 2,000. The constant retreat had been telling on them; and many of the fugitives from Johannesburg had scattered about the country, had followed Kruger to the east, or were staying at home in Pretoria.

Du Toit, who since the fall of Johannesburg had arrived from Fourteen Streams with part of the force which had been dispersed by Hunter, occupied a pass about twenty miles south-west of Pretoria. The object of this force was to check any wide turning movement through Commando or

* Tucker's force, now he had left the 15th Brigade to garrison Johannesburg, consisted of the 14th Brigade (Maxwell), 3 batteries, 18th, 75th, 62nd (Lt.-Col. Hall); 26th Co. R.E. (Major Grant); 1st Co. C.I.V.M.I. and Prince Alfred's Guards M.I., Nesbitt's Horse, and two 5-inch guns (Major Foster).

Zilikats Neks. De la Rey, with Von Lossberg's six-gun battery, was holding the Quagga Poort line of hills immediately south of Pretoria. Further south Lemmer, with Pretorius's guns, was defending the kopjes east and north of Irene Station and Six Mile Spruit.

Order of march.

The order of march of Lord Roberts's army was practically unchanged. Tactically the mistake of this arrangement was the lack of adequate provision for blocking the Boer line of retreat along the railway to Delagoa Bay. A half-hearted attempt, it is true, was made. On June 1 Major Hunter-Weston was sent with 200 men of General Gordon's brigade to endeavour to cut the Delagoa Bay line; but they had not gone more than nine miles from the bivouac before they were attacked by a large force of Boers and forced to retreat, with the loss of four officers wounded and ten other casualties in the rank and file. What this small party failed to do would almost certainly have been effected by a brigade of cavalry assisted by mounted infantry, and a successful stroke of this nature would probably have obviated the necessity for the fight at Diamond Hill, and might even have ensured the complete submission of the Boer forces. Lord Roberts had, it appears, some cause for thinking that President Kruger would retreat to Rustenburg, his own country in the west, but his refusal to send a sufficient force to the east was no doubt chiefly due to an exaggerated belief in the strength of Pretoria, which would make it unwise to dissipate his force, in case a *coup de main* were called for. But the reasons which were satisfactory for not sending off Ian Hamilton from Kroonstad no longer applied within forty miles of Pretoria, and, as a matter of fact, the cavalry were sent as far away to the west as they might have been usefully employed on the east.

No serious attempt made to cut off Boer retreat.

June 3. French opposed on the left flank.

French's orders for the 3rd were to go with Hutton well to the west of Pretoria, and on the following day to cut the railway north of Pretoria. Hamilton, as before, was to support him in rear, while the rest of the force advanced directly on Pretoria. French, starting early, met with no opposition until about 2 P.M., when he had reached a point west of the Crocodile River, where he found Du Toit's com-

mando posted on a ridge. Ordering Alderson's M.I. to hold the Boers in front he attempted to cut them off by sending Porter's brigade to the east and Dickson's to the west. The Boers, as usual, anticipated these tactics by retiring before their retreat was endangered, drawing on the cavalry from ridge to ridge, and exhausting their horses, which had already made a long march over rough ground intersected by numerous spruits and rocky kopjes. About 4.30 P.M. Porter's advanced patrols reached Kalkheuvel south of a defile over the Witwatersberg. There was then no sign of any Boers, and it was thought that they had fled over the Crocodile River by Welgegund Drift on the other side of the defile. General French, being anxious to secure the drift that night, ordered the 1st Brigade forward. Two squadrons of the Inniskillings were sent to the right and one squadron of Scots Greys to the left; but before these flanking troops had thoroughly searched the ridges the advanced patrols had entered the defile, and were suddenly fired on by Boers who were lying in ambush on both sides of the roadway. For the moment a panic ensued, the patrols being driven back with the loss of three killed and six wounded. General French, who was up at the front, ordered all mounted men, including his own staff, to dismount and obtain any cover available; the 1st Battalion M.I. of Alderson's corps, with two guns of "G" Battery, were brought up to the ridge on the west of the defile, Dickson's brigade also came up on the left of the 1st Cavalry Brigade, and shortly after nightfall the Boers were driven from their position. The cavalry bivouacked that night at Kalkheuvel farm, nearly twenty miles south-west of Pretoria, Hutton's M.I. (except Alderson's Corps) being about a mile to the south-west.

Rest of Roberts's army meet with no opposition.

The other columns of the army marched on this day without opposition to the places indicated in Lord Roberts's orders, half-way between Johannesburg and Pretoria. General Ian Hamilton, on the left, reached Diepsloot; the main body, with the Commander-in-Chief's headquarters, Leeuwkop; Gordon's brigade was six miles further to the right near Waterval. During the night Gordon, under instructions from headquarters, reconnoitred as far as Six Mile Spruit,

and ascertained that both sides of the spruit, from Zwartkop on the west to Irene Station on the railway, were weakly held by the enemy. Reports at the same time reached Lord Roberts that General Botha's troops were leaving Pretoria as fast as trains could be obtained to convey them eastwards, and that though Botha was still in the town it was not his intention to risk a battle in defence of the capital. Instead of trying to cut off their retreat, even at the last moment, the Field-Marshal decided to draw in Ian Hamilton's column towards the main body on the morning of the 4th, and march with his whole force direct on Pretoria, leaving only French to continue his march to the western flank.

June 4. French reaches Commando Nek.

Accordingly French crossed the Witwatersberg down to the bridge over the Crocodile near Commando Nek, twenty miles west of Pretoria. Detailing Dickson to seize Commando Nek, he sent the Scots Greys over the river to hold Zilikats Nek, and established the rest of his force just south of the Magaliesberg. If a serious defence of Pretoria had been intended he would have been excellently placed to advance on the town from the west or the north; but as no prolonged resistance was made to Lord Roberts's main force, French's rapidity and dash were wasted in the position to which he had been ordered.*

Roberts finds Boers in some strength at Six Mile Spruit.

On the same day Gordon advanced on the right of the main column to Irene Station, but finding strong opposition there, retired towards the centre later in the day without having effected anything. Henry's M.I., riding in advance of the infantry, drove some Boers from the bridge and drift over Six Mile Spruit, to the west of Irene, and occupied Zwartkop on the northern bank, whence the Boer position on the Quagga Poort ridge disclosed itself. But a further advance was at once checked by a heavy fire all along the Boer line. Lord Roberts thereupon directed the Seventh and Eleventh Divisions to deploy for the attack, while the artillery was hurried over the stream and ordered to shell the enemy's position. By 12.30 P.M. seven batteries besides the

* On the following day French and Hutton marched in parallel lines north and south respectively of the Magaliesberg, to camping-grounds north-west of Pretoria. No incident marked their march on that day.

heavy guns were in action right and left of the Potchefstroom road, and the fire of the Boer guns was speedily silenced. Crossing the spruit at 1 P.M., Lord Roberts took up a position at Zwartkop, from the top of which he could view and direct the movements of the whole force under his command.

Ian Hamilton arrives.

General Ian Hamilton, who had marched from Diepsloot that morning, crossed the spruit at Erasmus Dam three miles to the west of Zwartkop about 2 P.M., and immediately made the presence of his large mounted force felt. He found himself opposite De la Rey, who was holding so strong a position on the ridge west of Quagga Poort, that a direct advance against him seemed out of the question. But further west the ridge dipped down into the plain; at this point there appeared to be an opening for cavalry. Broadwood with the 2nd Cavalry Brigade and De Lisle with the 2nd M.I. Corps were sent forward accordingly to turn the Boer position. Colonel De Lisle,* making a shorter detour to the west than General Broadwood,† soon out-distanced the cavalry, and succeeded in gaining the ridge held by the Boers without any check, getting well behind the right flank of the position, capturing a Maxim gun on the way, and causing the enemy, who were being vigorously attacked in front by the infantry of the main body, to make a rapid retreat into Pretoria. By 4.45 Colonel De Lisle had reached a hill subsequently known as Proclamation Hill, about 3,000 yards west of the town, and the fight for Pretoria was over. Lieutenant Watson of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles was sent by De Lisle under a flag of truce to demand the surrender of the town, and after a short parley with General Botha he came back again with the commandant of Pretoria and Mr. Reitz's secretary bearing a letter from General Botha to Lord Roberts. De Lisle's envoy had given the impression to the Boers that Lord Roberts with his whole force was on the outskirts of the town, and their envoys were much

De Lisle demands surrender of Pretoria.

* De Lisle had with him his own 6th M.I. Corps, the West Australian and the New South Wales Mounted Rifles.

† General Broadwood did not think it possible to take his cavalry over the hills which De Lisle's men climbed, and preferred to go right round the Boer flank, not arriving till after dark in the valley behind their position.

astonished at having to ride six miles before finding Lord Roberts on Six Mile Spruit. Botha proposed to Lord Roberts that he should come out next day to discuss the question of surrendering the town, but Lord Roberts answered that he would only accept unconditional surrender. The Boer leader had no alternative but to accept, and on the following day, 5th June, 1900, Lord Roberts brought his great march to an end with a solemn entry into Pretoria, where the Union Jack was again displayed after an interval of nearly twenty years.*

June 5. Roberts enters Pretoria.

IV

Lord Roberts's general idea in going to Pretoria has already been discussed in an earlier chapter; the strategic results of the march will be better understood when the subsequent course of events has been described. A few words, however, may here be said on the march viewed as a military achievement.

The march to Pretoria viewed as a military achievement.

Lord Roberts no doubt made mistakes which to the military critic are now obvious. But there are few military operations, even the most successful, of which it is not possible to say that here and there a mistake was made which lost a part of the gain intended. A history would be of little value that did not point out the mistakes; it would be even less valuable if the essential success were obscured by a long list and condemnation of errors. In making his decision at the time a commander has to strike the balance of risks, and yet to beware of striking it too meticulously for fear he should lose that rapidity of action and that power of imposing his will on the adversary which are the chief essentials of victory.

Danger of carping criticism.

It may be admitted at the outset that the Boers were left practically untouched by the march. Like the waves of the sea before a man-of-war they parted before the advance of the great army, only to gather round it again when it had passed on. The fact is that in a country like South Africa, with intelligent enemies like the Boers, who knew its every donga and kopje and river-bed, very few combinations could have brought them to stand if they were not inclined

Boers left untouched by it.

* See note ‡ on pp. 224–5.

to stand. Buller's rapid advance from Natal might possibly have pinned them down where Roberts's army alone could not. A sweep round on Kroonstad by the cavalry, or a serious attempt to cut the Delagoa Bay line from Johannesburg, might possibly have effected more, and they were at any rate worth trying. But even then the Boers might have escaped, and would certainly have attempted to.

Boer unwillingness to fight battles.

Battles cannot be fought or victories won in the field if the enemy does not stand, and, as the course of this narrative has shown, the battles in this march to Pretoria were comparatively unimportant in their effect. In Napoleon's Russian campaign the Russians adopted something of the same strategy against him as the Boers did against Lord Roberts; but when the Russians did fight it was to some purpose, and in the battle of Borodino alone the casualties on their side were greater than the total casualties in battle of the English side during the whole Anglo-Boer war.* In Lord Roberts's march, besides unimportant snipings, the only engagements of the central column were at Brandfort, Vet River, Zand River, Germiston and Six Mile Spruit—but in most wars these would hardly have been regarded as more than skirmishes. Some of Ian Hamilton's six fights at Houtnek, Welkom, the Zand River, round Lindley, at Doornkop, and at Six Mile Spruit were more serious affairs, but even of these not one can be called a memorable battle.

Marching achievement of Roberts's army.

But apart from the question of battles, as a march this advance to Pretoria is notable. Lord Roberts left Bloemfontein on May 3rd and entered Pretoria on June 5th. During these thirty-four days his central column marched just 300 miles, but for sixteen of the thirty-four days they were halting. The average daily distance which they covered was, therefore, sixteen and a half miles on marching days, or eight and a half miles for the whole time. The flank columns had even harder work. Ian Hamilton started three days earlier from Thaba 'Nchu and marched 380 miles, so

* The total Boer losses between March 13th and June 5th probably did not exceed 500. During the same period the losses on the English side, including prisoners, amounted to 3,500. These figures refer to losses over the whole field of operations.

that his average day's march was over ten miles; and he had only eight days' halt during the whole thirty-seven days.* The distance covered by Hutton's mounted infantry and French's two cavalry brigades on the left flank is more difficult to estimate, as they took large detours, but it cannot have been less than 350 miles. Moreover, after leaving Bloemfontein, they had hardly a complete day's rest.

* *Marches of the Central Column to Pretoria.*

		Miles.
May	3. Bloemfontein to Karee	22
	3. Brandfort	14
,,	4. Halt.	
,,	5. Vet River	22
,,	6. Smaldeel	8
,,	7–8. Halt.	
,,	9. Welgelegen	14
,,	10. 2 m. N. of Rietspruit Stn.	19
,,	11. Geneva Siding	15
,,	12. Kroonstad	14
,,	13–21. Halt.	
,,	22. Honing Spruit	21
,,	23. Rhenoster River	16
,,	24. Vredefort Rd. Stn.	15
May	25. 2 m. N. of Grootvlei Stn.	12
,,	26. Taaibosch Spruit	17
,,	27. Vereeniging	10
,,	28. Klip River	21
,,	29. Germiston	15
,,	30. Halt.	
,,	31. Johannesburg	10
June	1–2. Halt.	
,,	3. Leeuwkop	12
,,	4. Zwart Kop	14
,,	5. Pretoria	8
		299

Marches of Ian Hamilton's Column.

		Miles.
Apl.	29. Thaba 'Nchu.	
,,	30. Toba	15
May	1–2. Jacobsrust	3
,,	3. Isabellafontein	16
,,	4. Welkom	16
,,	5. Winburg	15
,,	6. Dankbaarfontein	10
,,	7–8. Halt.	
,,	9. Bloemplatz	12
,,	10. 4 m. S. of Ventersburg	12
,,	11. Twistniet	16
,,	12. Kroonstad	20
,,	13–15. Halt.	
,,	16. Tweepunt	18
,,	17. Elandspruit	17
,,	18. Lindley	19
,,	20. Karroospruit	15
,,	21. Witpoort	19
May	22. Heilbron	13
,,	23. Spitz Kop	11
,,	24. Elysium, N. of Vredefort Rd.	14
,,	25. Wolvehoek	8
,,	26. Boschbank	15
,,	27. Wildebeestfontein	23
,,	28. Cyferfontein	9
,,	29. Doornkop	18
,,	30. Florida	6
,,	31. Halt.	
June	1. Braamfontein	5
,,	2. Halt.	
,,	3. Diepsloot	17
,,	4. Six Mile Spruit	14
,,	5. Pretoria	8
		384

Losses on the march.

As Colonel Henderson said in his 'Science of War,' "marching makes the greatest demands on the subordination of the men and the exertions of the officers," and there is not much fear that an army which has shown the discipline and self-control necessary to accomplish such a march will not do itself credit in the excitement of battle. The loss of men on the march no doubt appears considerable. Lord Roberts entered Pretoria at the head of about 26,000 troops. Thus, including the force left behind at Johannesburg, his own central column and Ian Hamilton's had been reduced from 38,000* to 29,000. But the remarkable point to notice about this reduction is that its high proportion of nearly one-fourth is due largely to losses in the cavalry. In the infantry the loss was not as much as one twenty-fifth of the total.† It is obvious therefore that the losses which occurred were due not

* See chap. iii., p. 89.

† Exact figures for a comparison of each unit at the start and on arrival at Pretoria are not available. However, a member of Lord Roberts's staff compiled the numbers of "fighting strength" of the army at Kroonstad on May 19th and at Pretoria on June 9th. These numbers do not include staff, or any but the effective rifles and sabres on those two dates. A comparison of the figures for certain units on the two dates will illustrate the point stated in the text, for it must be remembered that the longest and most continuous marches occurred after Kroonstad.

	May 19.		June 9.		Decrease on June 9.	
	Officers.	Men.	Officers.	Men.	Total.	Approximate Percentage.
Infantry—						
11th Division .	202	6,541	199	6,353	191	3 p. c.
14th brigade .	74	2,657	83	2,498	150	5 p. c.*
21st brigade .	96	3,270	100	3,160	106	3 p.c. (with Ian Hamilton)
Cavalry—						
1st Cav. brigade	58	956	60	550	404	40 p. c.
2nd Cav. brigade	51	1,000	60	660	331	30 p. c. (with Ian Hamilton)
3rd Cav. brigade	65	1,022	60	1,040	+ 13	1 *p. c. increase*
4th Cav. brigade	61	970	50	350	631	60 p. c.
Mounted Infantry—						
2nd, 5th, 6th and 7th Corps . .	187	3,340	190	2,700	639	18 p. c.

* These figures are taken from the Staff Diaries of 7th Division, and refer to 16th May and 16th June.

to any bad marching in the men but to the extravagant waste of cavalry horses. After making all due allowance for bad remounts and hard work, this waste is a reflection on the training of the cavalry in horse-management. On the other hand, the remarkable absence of stragglers during this march is the highest tribute to the efficiency of the army and the enthusiasm inspired by its leader.

Comparison with other great marches.

Indeed, this advance takes its place among the memorable marches in military history. Only to take examples from recent history: in 1805 the Grand Army of Napoleon marched from the Channel to the Rhine, covering 400 miles in twenty-five days, a daily average of sixteen miles. But on this occasion the French army was divided into three corps, each corps using a different road and marching with a day's interval between divisions. Moreover the roads were good, the population friendly, supplies had been plentifully collected at previously arranged depôts, and the march was unopposed throughout. In the Franco-Prussian War after Gravelotte, the six army corps which composed the armies of the Crown Princes of Prussia and Saxony, amounting to 220,000 men, and encumbered with a huge supply train, marched for nine days consecutively in pursuit of MacMahon, in many instances traversing twenty-four miles a day. But the gigantic effort cost the Crown Prince of Saxony one-third of his infantry.* Again, in August, 1880, Lord Roberts himself marched from Kabul to Kandahar with 10,000 fighting men, 8,000 native followers, 2,000 horses, and 8,000 transport animals. The distance was 303 miles, and was completed in twenty days, inclusive of one day's halt, giving an average of rather over fifteen miles a day. This was undoubtedly a fine performance, but men and animals had been carefully picked, no wheeled transport was taken, and the troops marched as a flying column, preserving no communications, and carrying supplies with them. The march, moreover, was unopposed throughout.

The advance to Pretoria was rapid and well organized; this was Lord Roberts's part. It is also distinguished for the magnificent spirit and discipline displayed by the men.

* Henderson's 'Science of War,' p. 206.

This spirit and this discipline are not indeed the exclusive attribute of Englishmen; on the whole, in the Franco-German war the German soldiers displayed them equally with almost greater temptations, and more recently the Japanese soldiers have shown them signally. But when it is remembered that this march was one of the most rapid in the annals of war, that the supplies of food and water were very limited, that the alternations of heat in the day-time and bitter cold at night were very great, and that the self-control of the men was maintained throughout, the words of Lord Roberts's farewell order to his army will not seem undeserved: "You have, in fact, acted up to the highest standard of patriotism, and by your conspicuous kindness and humanity towards your enemies, your forbearance and good behaviour in the towns occupied, you have caused the Army of Great Britain to be as highly respected as it must henceforth be greatly feared in South Africa."

CHAPTER V

BULLER'S ADVANCE THROUGH NATAL

Buller's the most important of the subsidiary columns.

Of all the columns which by Roberts's scheme were to converge on Pretoria concurrently with his own advance, the most important, both in virtue of its numerical strength and of its strategical position, was General Buller's. To understand the operations of this force it is necessary to take up Buller's history immediately after the relief of Ladysmith.

Buller, after the relief of Ladysmith, Feb. 28,

After that event the immediate object of the Natal Field Force was accomplished, and its separate existence with an objective unconnected with the broad strategic aims of the campaign ceases. The eventual destination of the forces in Natal, after Ladysmith had been relieved, first became the subject of communications between Roberts and Buller whilst the former was still at Paardeberg, and when the latter's operations had come to a standstill in the entanglement of Hart's Hollow. The result of Lord Roberts's invasion of the Free State from the west being to roll up the various Boer forces distributed along the northern frontier of Cape Colony, and make them retreat northward across his front, he had to contemplate the probability of finding a strong force of the enemy lying to the east of him ready to threaten his exposed right flank when, on reaching Bloemfontein, he wheeled northward. To cover his flank, therefore, and to complete the movement he had so successfully begun, it was desirable to move up as strong a force as possible from the south in order both to clear the enemy out of the south-east corner of the Free State and to open up the railway communications with Bloemfontein. For this purpose Gatacre's little force at Stormberg was quite inadequate,

asked by Roberts to send a division to the Free State.

and the matter being one of paramount importance, Roberts telegraphed to Buller on February 24 to send Sir George White and Warren's Division to East London as soon as the relief had been accomplished. Such a reduction to meet the urgent needs of the main theatre of the war would in no way have crippled the Natal Army, which, immediately after the relief, numbered 55,000 men.* That Roberts was right there cannot be the least doubt, and it is well worth considering whether, had the demand been adhered to and promptly carried out, the whole series of complications that began at Reddersburg and Wepener and culminated at Sannah's Post would not have been avoided. This plan had the additional advantage of solving the question of what command to give White, for whom there was no scope in Natal and no available troops elsewhere. That question, however, eventually solved itself by his being invalided home.

Buller objects, but does nothing.

But from the very first Buller offered the most strenuous opposition to any idea of taking away part of his force. Telegraphing on March 2, that he did not think the Boers would stand south of Laing's Nek, he suggested sending three brigades to occupy Northern Natal and attacking the Drakensberg with his remaining two divisions, and passing them through into the Free State to join hands with Roberts. Whilst proposing operations on this extended scale he did not, however, make the least attempt to grasp the unique opportunity that still presented itself to him for dealing a conclusive blow against the Boers. Instead of pursuing the Boers who were only persuaded to return to line the Biggarsberg range a week after the relief of Ladysmith, Buller was quietly marching his troops into camp around Ladysmith.† Roberts was, however, at that date by no means sure of the results of his march upon Bloemfontein, nor in a position to co-operate with an advance of Buller's across the Drakensberg; he accordingly telegraphed back from Paardeberg telling him to stand on the strict defensive and send off the Fifth Division at once to East London.

These two telegrams opened what is best described as a

* War Commission. Appendix, p. 9.

† See vol. iii., pp. 543–548.

telegraphic controversy between Roberts and Buller on the subject of Buller's future movements, in which between forty and fifty telegrams passed and which lasted almost up to the time when Buller began his advance in May. It is difficult to trace in Buller's telegrams, which alternated in their tone between almost extravagant optimism and the profoundest pessimism, any attempt at a well-considered plan of operations to meet the situation which confronted him. Instead, he displayed a vacillation and at times a nervousness, which, in conjunction with intelligence reports as to the enemy's strength and movements, now known to have been misleading, drove him backwards and forwards from one alternative to another, and finally led him to reject them all. Roberts, who behaved with marvellous forbearance throughout, had for his sole objects either to induce Buller to operate to the best advantage with the large force at his disposal, or should Buller be unable to do this, to make him hand over some portion of his force to supply the deficiency of men from which he himself was suffering. The choice lay between a western advance over the Drakensberg into the Eastern Free State, or a northern advance through Natal, or both. On March 2 Buller proposed carrying out the two simultaneously; on March 5 he proposed the northern route, and on March 7 the western. He estimated the total Boer forces at about 18,000 men and 16 guns, and reiterated his opinion that he had barely sufficient men for the work. Roberts, who was still in no position to co-operate with an advance by Buller into the Free State, sanctioned the northern advance. Buller now declared that he could not advance without Warren's division. The division was already on its way round, but on March 10, the day of Driefontein, Roberts felt he could risk doing without it to help Buller, and telegraphed to Buller to keep it. But, now that instant preparations should have been begun for immediate advance, the whole tone of Buller's telegrams began to change. The strength of the Boers, the unfitness of the Ladysmith garrison, the strategic danger of leaving the Free Staters upon his flank, the alleged paucity of cavalry, of guns, of R.E., of clothes, of boots, and of remounts, were each in turn adduced as reasons for delaying

Telegraphic controversy between Roberts and Buller, March–April.

the start. By March 19, when his estimate of the Boer forces on his front and flank had risen to 25,000 men, he took so pessimistic a view, that he suggested that Roberts should clear the Drakensberg passes, 200 miles away, in order to enable him to move northward. On March 24, however, he suggested that he might reach Harrismith with a division. Roberts, at that time looking forward to a speedy resumption of his advance, took up the suggestion with alacrity. Buller promptly raised difficulties, and the plan fell through. And so the discussion went on; the result was in each and every case the same, failure on the part of Roberts to get Buller to move. Finally, despairing of getting any co-operation from Buller, Roberts, on April 8, took from him Hunter's Division and the I.L.H., and told him to remain on the defensive.

Buller inactive for these two months.

The two months that followed the relief of Ladysmith were, therefore, a time of complete inaction for the Natal army. At the beginning of March the Second Division under Lyttelton, and the 1st Cavalry Brigade under Burn-Murdoch, relieved by Dundonald's brigade on April 7, moved to Elandslaagte, where they formed an advanced camp on open ground to the south of Sunday's river. The infantry of the Ladysmith garrison were sent to recruit at Arcadia, a few miles to the west of Ladysmith, and to Colenso. The rest of the force lay round Ladysmith. As was happening at Bloemfontein, the combined effects of previous hard work and bad water caused a great outbreak of sickness, chiefly enteric fever and dysentery, among the relief force, which, together with the large numbers of wounded and of the Ladysmith sick, taxed the hospitals of Natal to their utmost capacity.

The arrangement of commands.

Towards the end of March, General Clery, who had been in hospital since Vaal Krantz, returned to duty, and took over the Second Division from Lyttelton, who was given command of the Fourth Division, consisting of the 7th and 8th Brigades, formed of the Ladysmith garrison. General Hunter was given command of the Tenth Division, consisting of Hart's (5th) and Barton's (6th) Brigades. Towards the end of April, at Buller's suggestion, Roberts placed Warren in command of the small operations that were taking

place in the north-western district of Cape Colony, and General Hildyard was given command of the Fifth Division. Colonel Hamilton, of the Queen's, took command of the 2nd Brigade, and Colonel Cooper of the Dublin Fusiliers took command of the 4th Brigade, vacant by Lyttelton's promotion.

Boers also inactive.

When Louis Botha crossed over to the Free State to oppose Roberts's advance, he took with him a considerable number of the Transvaalers, leaving about 8,000 on the Biggarsberg.* This withdrawal, and the transfer of the command to a general of the proved incompetence of Lukas Meyer, were not calculated to increase the confidence or activity of the Boers. Meyer took up his headquarters between Dundee and Glencoe, and disposed his men from the west of the Sunday's river to Helpmakaar, the point where the Biggarsberg makes an abrupt termination on the borders of Zululand. The Drakensberg passes were also held, though not in very great force, by the Free Staters. The Boers remained for the greater part of the time very quiescent, and, except for a few affairs of outposts, there was only one break in the monotony of the long period of waiting. This was on April 10th, when the Boers brought seven or eight field-guns into position on the hills on the left bank of the Sunday's river, and shelled Elandslaagte camp. Their fire was replied to by long-range guns, and a little musketry fire was exchanged between the reinforced outposts of the 2nd Brigade on the right bank and some Boers on the left bank of the river. Firing was continued most of the day, but with very little effect, Clery's force suffering seventeen casualties. As a result of this, the camp was moved back a couple of miles, near the rising ground over which the battle of Elandslaagte had been fought.

except on April 10th.

Beginning of May, Buller ordered to occupy Boers on Biggarsberg.

The beginning of May found Roberts on the point of starting from Bloemfontein, and on May 2 he telegraphed to Buller directing him to occupy the attention of the Boers on the Biggarsberg whilst he himself continued his advance through the Free State.

The Northern Natal route being finally settled upon in

* Commandant Du Preez, with part of the Krugersdorp commando, had previously gone to reinforce Liebenberg in the north-west of Cape Colony. See chap. vi., p. 216.

Buller's plan for a turning movement by Helpmakaar.

this manner, it only remained to choose the best method of penetrating through this difficult and mountainous country. The Biggarsberg, which is the most important of several spurs of the Drakensberg running out into Natal, stops abruptly at Helpmakaar, between thirty and forty miles to the east of Ladysmith. The greater part of its length, and especially the passes where the railway and the Newcastle road penetrate it, had been heavily fortified by the Boers. A turning movement by Helpmakaar was the obvious plan, and it was the one upon which Buller decided. Preparations were made with considerable elaboration. The turning force, which Buller himself proposed to command, was to consist of Clery's Second Division, the 3rd Mounted Brigade * and guns; a compact little force, but by no means an extremely mobile one, as besides the regimental transport, they were to be accompanied by a supply park to contain ten days' supplies. It was Buller's intention that this turning force should maintain touch with the rest of his army, and should form the head of a great sweeping movement that was to pivot upon Elandslaagte, the idea apparently being that once Clery's force had made its position good upon the end of the Biggarsberg, the whole line would then advance and sweep away the Boers, whose flank would be threatened. Hildyard was given the work of pivoting on Elandslaagte and of keeping touch with and protecting the left of Clery's force in its flank march; while Lyttelton remained covering Ladysmith.

May 10. Clery's force concentrates at Sunday's River Drift.

Clery's force was withdrawn as far as Modderspruit Station, and, as it turned out, this to a large extent succeeded in concealing its movements from the Boers. The country which lay in front of Clery was admirably suited for the purpose of masking a flank march, being for the most part thickly wooded; but, on the other hand, the Ladysmith-Helpmakaar road was hilly and bad, and was further obstructed by two rather difficult crossings over the Sunday's and Waschbank rivers. The concentration of the column at the drift where the Ladysmith-Helpmakaar road

* Since the relief of Ladysmith the 3rd Mounted Brigade had been augmented by Dartnell's command, consisting of the Natal Carbineers, Border Mounted Rifles, and Natal Mounted Rifles.

crosses the Sunday's river was completed on May 10, the force being under the nominal command of Clery, but under actual control of Buller, who rode out from Ladysmith and joined it in the evening.*

May 11. Buller advances east with Clery's force.

This movement was effectively masked by Hildyard, who extended Coke's brigade to the eastward, the Dorsets occupying Indoda mountain, and the Middlesex taking up a line from there to the Sunday's river. On the 11th Buller advanced nine miles to the east and camped on the Waschbank river. Dundonald's Brigade, which covered the left flank and the front of the force, maintained touch with Coke's men at Indoda and encountered some of the enemy to the east of that mountain. Progress was slow, owing to the badness of the road, and Buller's rearguard was not in camp till early on the morning of the 12th.

Helpmakaar position described.

After crossing the Waschbank river Buller could no longer conceal his movements from the enemy, who were gathered in considerable force on the top of the Biggarsberg. This range, after running east from the Drakensberg, turns almost due south near Glencoe as far as Helpmakaar, where it is rounded off in the shape of the letter "J." From Waschbank drift two roads lead over flat, open country to the foot of the Berg. The shortest, straightest, and most obvious road led to Beith, a little village on the top of the Biggarsberg about seven or eight miles north of Helpmakaar. This road, which scaled the Biggarsberg through a deep and narrow defile, was that down which Yule had retreated on his way from Dundee, and was the one by which the Boers evidently thought Buller would now come. The other road, which was much longer, wound its way in a south-easterly direction, and soon became involved in the hills at the end of the "J." It

* Composition of the column:—
2nd Division.
3rd Mounted Brigade (Dundonald).
A Battery R.H.A.
2nd Brigade Division R.A. (7th, 63rd, 64th Batteries R.F.A.).
61st Howitzer Battery.
Two 4·7 guns and eight 12-pounder guns.
Three pom-poms.
R.E. and details.
Supply column with ten days' supplies.

climbed a long sloping valley, called the Uithoek Valley, with high hills on either hand, until at the head of the valley it reached the level of the top of the Biggarsberg, and then turned sharply eastward and ran along a narrow nek about a mile long to Helpmakaar, where it debouched upon the flat summit of the main Biggarsberg. The main feature on the eastern side of the Uithoek Valley was Uithoek Hill—a high hill which commanded the road as far as Helpmakaar.

May 12. Buller deceives the Boers.

From the point of view of attack, the Helpmakaar road was undoubtedly the better of the two. An advance along the Beith road meant a frontal attack on the Biggarsberg, but the broken ground around Helpmakaar made the use of more skilful tactics possible. There was, moreover, an additional reason for choosing the Helpmakaar road. Buller was in telegraphic communication with a force of 1,500 men moving up from the south to co-operate with him, which consisted of Bethune's Mounted Infantry, the Umvoti Mounted Rifles, the Imperial Light Infantry, the Natal Hotchkiss Battery, and some naval 12-pounders, all under the command of Colonel Bethune.* This little force, which since February had been guarding Buller's right flank in the neighbourhood of Greytown, had orders to assist Buller by attacking Helpmakaar from the south and thus enable him, if the two attacks were properly timed, to deliver an enveloping attack upon the extremity of the range of hills. The crossing of the Waschbank drift, which was a deep and sandy one, took a long time, and Buller was not able to move far on the 12th. He left the supply park, with the Scottish Rifles as escort, at the drift so as to save them a long detour by Helpmakaar. He then moved about six miles in a south-easterly direction and bivouacked at Vermaak's Kraal. It was a bad camping-ground; there was little water, and it was within easy artillery range of the top of the Biggarsberg. But it had the great advantage of deceiving the Boers as to Buller's intentions. Most of the Boers on the Biggarsberg were concentrated at Beith, and Buller's actions apparently led them to believe that he would attack the Biggarsberg a little to the south of that village. To them the manœuvre

* See vol. iii., p. 330.

must have seemed very similar to Buller's advance into the Colenso basin after the capture of Hlangwane Hill, and they joyfully dragged up their guns as soon as there was light enough on the morning of the 13th, and opened a brisk shell-fire on the camp. The bivouac was already breaking up, and Dundonald, who had been given the post of honour for the day, was beginning to move out when the fire began. The 4·7 guns were quickly brought into action, and succeeded in silencing the Boer fire before it had done much damage.

May 13. Buller crosses Boer front toward Helpmakaar.

The tactical advantage at the beginning of the day lay with the Boers. Buller, who had to make all his movements in full view of the enemy, had to depend upon rapidity of execution and to trust to Bethune's co-operation being well-timed. He ordered Dundonald to cover the advance up the Uithoek Valley, and Hamilton's Brigade to follow in support, the Light Brigade being rearguard. Dundonald sent Dartnell with the Natal Volunteers to clear the hills on the west of the road and the South African Light Horse and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry to the east of it, directing the latter corps, who were leading, to seize Uithoek Hill, which was the key of the position. The Natal Volunteers climbed and occupied without opposition the hills along the west side of the Uithoek Valley, whilst Thorneycroft led his men straight at Uithoek Hill To his surprise he found the hill unoccupied save for an advance party of Colonel Bethune's force under Major Walter, who had climbed the height without opposition in the early morning. Leaving a squadron to hold it until the infantry came up, Thorneycroft swept on with the rest of the brigade unchecked up the valley. As they approached the nek they saw shells bursting over it, for Bethune, who had timed his arrival with the rest of his force most admirably, had brought his guns into action on the southern slopes.

Dundonald gains the summit of the Biggarsberg, and drives off Viljoen.

The Boers had been aware for several days that a British force was moving east of Ladysmith. Lukas Meyer,* however, who seemed convinced that Buller would attack in the centre, under-estimated the strength of the flanking column, and made

* Lukas Meyer returned from presiding over the last sitting of the Volksraad just in time to take part in this engagement. See chap. iv., p. 130.

no alteration in his dispositions to meet it. The Piet Retief commando, who held Helpmakaar, were kept there, but the main body, consisting of the Krugersdorp, Middelburg, Carolina, Lydenburg, and one of the Pretoria commandos, remained in the neighbourhood of Glencoe. On the night of May 11 Hildyard's movements originated a report that the British were advancing up the railway. A concentration of the Boer forces at this point of the Biggarsberg was, therefore, ordered. Thus it was that on the morning of the 13th the Beith-Helpmakaar portion of the Biggarsberg was only held by a quite inadequate force. To make matters worse the Boers had always been so confident of the strength of the Helpmakaar position, which has been called the Gibraltar of Natal, that they had expended very little trouble upon intrenching it. However, Commandant Ben Viljoen, who was the first to realise Buller's plan of attack, now took all the men he could muster, numbering about 500, and tried to remedy this fatal mistake by occupying the nek at the last moment. The Boers galloping along the top of the Berg were in full view of Dundonald, whose movements were also clearly seen by Viljoen. It became a race for the nek which led to Helpmakaar. But Dundonald had got a long start, and although he was moving over very broken ground, whilst Viljoen was on the level, he succeeded in keeping it. As he came near the nek Bethune's Mounted Infantry in extended order swept up over the hills from the south, and, joining hands with Dundonald, the two forces advanced in a long line, outflanking and enveloping the only intrenchments, which the Boers had made, consisting of a long trench across the road at the western extremity of the nek. The few Boers who held it retired rapidly, and Dundonald found himself on the summit of the Biggarsberg at the western extremity of the nek a few minutes before Viljoen threw his forces on to a number of small kopjes at the eastern end. Viljoen for the moment checked any further advance by promptly opening fire with a gun and a pom-pom. Dundonald brought "A" Battery into action close alongside the deserted trench, and a sharp little artillery duel took place, which resulted in the withdrawal of "A" Battery. Meanwhile, the

infantry were dashing up the valley, and the Queen's were occupying the ground over which Thorneycroft had advanced. Buller hurried forward his naval guns, and at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon brought them into action in place of the Chestnut Troop. Before nightfall the Boer guns had been silenced and the mounted troops relieved by the infantry, but no further advance was attempted for the day.

Night of May 13. Boers retire from Helpmakaar.

Although Viljoen still clung obstinately to Helpmakaar itself, he saw that after the loss of all the Uithoek Hills up to the Nek, his cramped little position on the few kopjes just round the village would soon be untenable if a flank movement from the south were attempted. It was, therefore, decided in a council of war, which the Boer leaders held that night, not to attempt what would prove both impracticable and costly. During the night the Boers slipped away from all their positions along the south-eastern end of the Biggarsberg, and before dawn the whole Boer force, with its guns and wagons, was in full retreat along the open and level road to Dundee.

Hildyard and Lyttelton remain in position.

On the 13th Hildyard was kept in the same position that he had previously occupied, and only brought up a few heavy guns. Lyttelton's division remained as before extended between Ladysmith and Elandslaagte.

May 14. Dundonald, followed by Clery, advances towards Dundee.

Early on the morning of the 14th Dundonald received orders to scout towards Helpmakaar, and began his advance soon after daylight. Finding Helpmakaar evacuated, the mounted troops began to advance northwards along the Dundee road. There was every evidence that the Boers were in full retreat. Their line of march was marked by a succession of grass fires; along the top of the Biggarsberg the grass was dead and so parched by the cold dry weather that a few lighted matches soon set the whole country in a blaze. The mounted troops thus found their sight impeded and their advance hampered by rolling masses of smoke and flame. Extending three regiments, Thorneycroft's, the South African Light Horse, and the Composite Regiment of mounted infantry, right across the open summit, Dundonald pushed on as fast as possible. They had not gone more than six miles before, emerging through

the smoke of one of the grass fires, Thorneycroft's suddenly found themselves under a heavy fire from a low ridge in front.

Lynch's Irish Brigade delay Dundonald.

In the general confusion of the Boer retirement there was one corps which, for the first and probably the last time, achieved some slight distinction. It was the 2nd Irish Brigade, commanded by Colonel Lynch. They, or at any rate a handful of them, undertook the work of covering the retirement, and succeeded in holding up Dundonald's pursuit for nearly an hour. It was not until the horse battery had been brought up and came into action against the ridge, and the flanks of Dundonald's long line began to work round it, that Lynch retired, setting fire to the grass as he went and enveloping himself almost instantaneously in a dense curtain of smoke. The advance was again resumed, Dundonald's men walking, trotting, and galloping as the smoke allowed them. Some seven or eight miles further on Lynch held them up again, and saved another hour of precious time before he slipped away into the smoke; so that it was not until 4 o'clock in the afternoon that Dundonald, straining every nerve in the pursuit, reached the long ridge of Blesbok-laagte, a spur of Indumeni mountain, which blocked the road to Dundee some twenty-five miles from Helpmakaar. But Lynch's rearguard action had enabled the Boers to cross the ridge with all their guns and wagons, and as Dundonald approached he was met by the fire of two or three guns upon the ridge. Again the horse battery was brought into action, and again the long line of mounted troops extended and felt for the enemy's flanks. But it was not till after 5 o'clock, with night fast coming on, that the Boers withdrew their guns and continued their retreat towards Dundee. Cheated of any tangible fruits of the pursuit, Dundonald withdrew his tired and smoke-begrimed men to camp a few miles back within the infantry outposts in accordance with a bad habit of the Natal army. Touch was thereby lost with the enemy, and was not regained by Dundonald until he came in contact with them nearly a week later at Laing's Nek.

The infantry and baggage, with Colonel Hamilton's brigade still in advance, were encamped round Beith; the

supply park received orders to take the direct road for Beith, by Van Tonder's Pass, whereby it was saved a march of many miles.

Baggage ordered to rejoin Dundonald by direct road to Beith.

On the night of the 13th the word to retire had been passed along all the Boer laagers on the Biggarsberg, and during the cavalry pursuit of the 14th every laager on the Biggarsberg broke up. From 4 P.M. till midnight an unbroken stream of wagons passed through Glencoe, and ten trainloads of burghers left that station. About 8 A.M. on the 15th Buller resumed his advance and entered Dundee without opposition; the last of the Boers had left it early that morning. On the 16th the infantry halted at Dundee, and the cavalry only went as far as Glencoe, which lies six miles to the west. The supply park continued its march from Beith and arrived during the day. Meanwhile, Hildyard with the 11th Brigade had advanced to Wessels Nek on the 15th, and to Waschbank on the 16th.

May 13–16. Buller occupies Glencoe and Dundee.

This concludes the first part of Buller's operations. He had succeeded in turning the Boers out of what was undoubtedly a very strong position on the Biggarsberg, which they had occupied for several months, with total casualties not exceeding twenty-five. In striking contrast with all his previous operations, he utilised all the forces at his command, and derived full advantage from Hildyard's co-operation on his left flank; moreover, when once he had started he did not hesitate, and kept on the move until he had completely dislodged the Boers from all their positions. His success is entirely due to these facts, and it shows how effective even a small amount of strategic momentum may be against an enemy however mobile. The way in which Buller completely outwitted the Boers at Helpmakaar, although he had to make all his movements in full view of them, was entirely admirable, and had he waited or hesitated on the morning of the 13th, when presumably he had a strongly intrenched position in front of him and was being shelled from the rear, he would probably have lost all the advantage that he had gained up to that time. On the other hand, it cannot be said that the operations were

Criticism of the operations.

conducted with any very remarkable degree of rapidity, or that Buller made full use of his opportunities. To succeed fully in its work the flanking column should have been as mobile as possible, and when, as in the present case, the country to be traversed was extremely hilly and difficult, the mobility of a column mainly composed of infantry was, of course, small. There could be little doubt that had the work of this column been entrusted more largely to cavalry it would have achieved its object better and been able to deal a heavier blow at so elusive an enemy as the Boers. A couple of months earlier Buller had been asking Roberts for more cavalry. Yet now that he had a real opportunity for using his cavalry he left two brigades of them behind at Ladysmith and only took the irregulars with him. Had he employed all his mounted troops he would have had a division of regular cavalry and nearly the same number of mounted infantry, a force which, had he chosen to let them go, could scarcely have failed to achieve some success against the retreating Boers, hampered as they were with an enormous mass of transport. Even as it was, Dundonald's pursuit, which lasted only a day without touching the main body of the Boers, had the effect of making them continue their retreat into the Transvaal. The fact is that, although in many respects the strategy and tactics of the Helpmakaar operations were infinitely superior to those which General Buller displayed in the earlier fighting for the relief of Ladysmith, he still showed his inability to appreciate or use cavalry and his indifference to the necessity for utilising victory to the utmost. One effect at least of this indifference was that it gave the Boers time to destroy most of the bridges on the railway, thereby greatly delaying Buller's advance in the later stages of these operations.

May 17. Buller advances to Dannhauser.

On May 17 Buller resumed his advance with the Second Division and Dundonald's mounted troops, and marched about fifteen miles from Dundee to the railway at Dannhauser, finding the bridges and culverts along the line badly destroyed. An intelligence patrol reached Newcastle that evening and found it unoccupied. Hildyard concentrated his division at Waschbank station; and Lyttelton moved

up to Modderspruit. A squadron of Thorneycroft's M.I., who were with Buller, reached Newcastle in the evening and found it unoccupied by the enemy. On the 18th Buller made a forced march of twenty-three miles to Newcastle, the infantry marching exceptionally well, and arrived there in the evening. Hildyard continued his advance as far as Hatting Spruit. On the 19th Buller pushed forward with the whole of Dundonald's cavalry and the 4th Brigade, the 2nd Brigade being left at Newcastle. Dundonald advanced along the road to Laing's Nek, and had not gained touch with the Boers until he had crossed the Ingogo Spruit and was within about four miles of the nek.

May 18. Buller enters Newcastle.

May 19. Dundonald advances to Laing's Nek

The main body of the Boers had crossed Laing's Nek during the 16th and 17th of May ; the bulk of their transport following on the latter day. For at least a day, and probably for two days, they appear to have left this nek unoccupied. Some of the commandos, either at that time or shortly afterwards, went to rejoin Louis Botha's main army opposing Lord Roberts. Besides the Standerton and Bethal commandos which had been transferred by Botha earlier in May, Buller's adversaries were now weakened by the loss of the Johannesburg and Boksburg commandos under Viljoen and Dirksen,* and though the Pretoria commando was not ordered up, most of the men composing it deserted from Natal in order to take part in the defence of their own district. There were similar desertions from other commandos. On the other hand the Wakkerstroom commando returned to their own district on the Natal border. On the 18th the remaining commandos rallied and, while the Lydenburg commando was sent to hold Botha's Pass further south on the Drakensberg, more returned to man the elaborate intrenchments that had been constructed during the early stages of the war at Laing's Nek. Lukas Meyer himself, however, left Natal to take up his position as commandant of Pretoria, leaving General Erasmus in chief command in Natal.

Weakening of Boer forces in front of Buller.

When, therefore, Dundonald arrived at the nek he found it strongly occupied and considerable parties of the enemy busily engaged in extending their intrenchments on either

Dundonald retires from Laing's Nek to Newcastle.

* See chap. iv., p. 137.

side. Its right flank was protected by Majuba, where also there were intrenchments, and its left flank by the Buffalo, with Pougwana Mountain beyond, from which one of the Boer Long Toms had an effective range of 10,500 yards. Dundonald advanced within about two miles of the nek and brought "A" Battery into action. The Boers did not reply with artillery, but moved some men from Majuba to menace his flanks. Thereupon Dundonald, who had Buller's orders not to become heavily engaged, and had achieved the object of his reconnaissance, retired to the Ingogo river and camped in advance of the infantry of the 4th Brigade on Ingogo heights. The headquarters of the Natal army were established at Newcastle.

May 20. Halt to repair railway.

Buller now set to work to bring up supplies and mend the railway before attempting any further advance. A steady stream of supply wagons was passed through from railhead at Elandslaagte to Newcastle, and all available men were employed in mending the destroyed portions of the railway as quickly as possible. Clery was given command of the Ingogo camp, where he had the 4th Brigade and an extra battalion, the Queen's, from the 2nd Brigade. Hildyard's division was employed in mending the line, and Lyttelton remained at Sunday's river until the 23rd, when he received orders to advance with his own division and the first cavalry brigade up the old road to Newcastle, which crosses the Biggarsberg some miles west of the railway.

Disposition of troops.

Bethune's expedition towards Vryheid.

Although the main body of the Boers had been driven northward by Buller, a certain number of them under Christiaan Botha had fallen back to the east. Bethune, who retained his detached command, had been ordered on May 16 to pursue some of them who were reported to be in the neighbourhood of Nqutu in Zululand. Finding no Boers here, and hearing of a commando reported to be on the Blood river, south of Vryheid, he marched thither on the 20th. The leading squadron of Bethune's M.I., under Captain Goff, which was considerably in advance of the main body, fell into an ambush on arriving at Scheeper's Nek, a difficult pass about six miles south-west of Vryheid and the same distance north of the Blood river. The squadron had advanced into the nek before

May 20. Goff's party ambushed.

it was met by a heavy fire from two farmhouses on the west side of the nek, and from some stony kopjes on the east, both at very close ranges. Goff's horses were shot down at once, but the dismounted squadron, bringing the Maxim into action, made a gallant attempt to force the nek. Commanded as they were on both sides, their position was hopeless. Goff himself and two of his subalterns were killed, and before the remainder of the squadron could extricate themselves they had lost thirty men killed, thirty wounded, and six prisoners. The fight was over before the main body could come up, and Bethune was forced to fall back to Nqutu for supplies, whence he marched through Dundee to Newcastle.

Roberts again tries unsuccessfully to get Buller over into the Free State.

Whilst Buller was advancing through Natal, Roberts's advance along the Free State Railway, and the simultaneous advance of Rundle and Brabant along the Basutoland frontier, had the effect of driving a considerable portion of the Free State forces, who were naturally averse to leaving their country, into the north-eastern corner of the Free State. Roberts, realising the danger of leaving a strong force on his flank as he advanced northwards, was concerting measures to drive them out of this district. He had previously given way to Buller's objections to moving some portion of the Natal army into the Eastern Free State; but now, as his own advance was driving the Boers further and further into the north-eastern corner, he again telegraphed to Buller to propose that he should cross the Drakensberg, and threaten the rear of the Free State forces by advancing on Vrede. At this period Buller was extremely gloomy about his chances of forcing his way through at any point. His intelligence department, he said, led him to believe that Roberts's advance, far from taking the pressure off him, had only driven large numbers both of Free Staters and Transvaalers on to him. Laing's Nek was too strong to be attacked, and his flanks were threatened. Roberts, deprecating the idea of sacrificing men in an attack upon Laing's Nek, urged Buller more strongly to adopt the Vrede route and advance by way of it into the Transvaal at Standerton. Finally, Buller, who seemed to

regard his position as almost desperate, again suggested that Roberts should send a division to the Drakensberg in order to enable him to cross it. At this Roberts apparently gave up all hope of getting any assistance from Buller, and, telegraphing on May 25 that he would manage without him, approved of his suggestion that he should advance northward and cut the Delagoa Bay Railway somewhere near Belfast. Buller's objections to the Vrede route were based partly upon the difficulties of transport it would entail and partly upon the difficult nature of the road. He certainly was somewhat short of transport, and had he moved his entire force by Vrede, this deficiency might have proved a serious obstacle to him. Again, there is a good deal to be said for his contention that if his objective was to be Standerton he should advance thither along the line of the railway. But had Buller chosen to bring up all his available men and overcome his apparent nervousness that his lines of communication in Natal would be cut, there is no doubt that it would have been quite possible to have made a simultaneous advance both by Vrede and along the railway, as soon as he had mended the line as far as Newcastle. That this would have assisted Roberts there can be very little doubt, as so many of the latter's troubles were due to the fact that in his advance all the Boers who had congregated in the north-eastern part of the Free State were out of his reach. The numbers of the Boer forces actually opposed to Buller do not maintain his contention that he had in front of him nearly half the federal forces; in any case the fact remains that Buller's advance failed to give Roberts's main advance the support that might have been expected.

Dutch in Natal submit on Buller's advance.

On the other hand, the moral effect of Buller's advance into Northern Natal had been considerable upon the Natal Dutch who surrendered in considerable numbers when he first arrived at Newcastle. This, coupled with the fact that he was now operating in a country in which twenty years before he had been exceedingly well known, probably led him to think that he might be able, by pacific means, to secure the surrender of most of the Boers in the district.

May 28. Railway repaired to Newcastle, but Buller still halts.

On May 28 the Boers opened fire with their 6-inch Creusot from an epaulment on the top of Pougwana on the Light Brigade, who had arrived and camped under a spur of Inkwelo on that day. The same day the railway was completed to Newcastle, but Buller, instead of immediately resuming his advance, as he then might well have done, appeared to think that Roberts's telegram of the 25th absolved him from any further need for haste. A small force of the local commandos were laagered in the vicinity of Utrecht under General Grobler, and Buller decided that before moving he would commence operations against them. On May 28, therefore, he ordered two forces, each consisting of about a brigade of infantry, with a strong complement of cavalry and artillery, under Lyttelton and Hildyard respectively, to march to Utrecht. Lyttelton was sent to clear the Doornberg hills, lying to the south of Utrecht, and Hildyard arrived outside Utrecht on the 29th. After a considerable amount of parleying, the town was formally surrendered by the landdrost, the commandos meanwhile taking up a position on the hills above the town and agreeing not to enter the town lest their presence there should cause it to be shelled. The Transvaal flag and six rifles were brought away in token of the town's submission, and Hildyard then marched to Coetzee's Drift on the Buffalo river, north of Newcastle. For uselessness this expedition may be compared with Ian Hamilton's to Lindley a fortnight earlier.* As soon as Hildyard had gone, the commandos reoccupied the town, tore down Buller's proclamation, and arrested the landdrost.

Sends expedition to Utrecht.

May 29–June 5. Negotiations with Christiaan Botha.

Meanwhile General Buller had been conducting negotiations with the Boers in Natal. On May 29 he wrote a letter to Commandant Christiaan Botha, who during the temporary absence of General Erasmus was in command at Laing's Nek, advising the Boers to desist from a hopeless struggle, and to come to terms. As a result of this letter Botha sent in a flag of truce, and on June 2 a conference between Buller and Botha, accompanied by their respective staffs, took place below Laing's Nek between the two outpost lines. Buller pointed out that Roberts was now at Ger-

* See chap. iv., p. 129.

miston, and that further resistance on the part of the Boers would only lead to useless waste of life; that he was anxious to prevent this, especially as a large number of the Boers opposing him were old friends of his, and he had therefore opened these negotiations. Botha replied that he had no authority to make terms, but asked Buller what his terms were. Buller, who had no authority either, said that the terms he would give were that the Boers dispersed to their farms, leaving their artillery but taking their rifles, the question of the ultimate surrender of these arms to be settled when peace was made. Buller agreed to communicate with Roberts on the subject, and Botha agreed to communicate with his Government, and in order to give time for this being done, a three days' armistice was concluded, during which no movement was to be made by either side beyond the present outpost line. Roberts, who had already had bitter experience of the ways of surrendered burghers, replied that his terms were unconditional surrender, the rank and file to deliver up arms and horses and to be allowed to go home on signing a pledge not to fight again during the war. Officers were to be kept on parole. These terms were communicated to Christiaan Botha by Buller. The three days of armistice were occupied by Buller in concentrating his forces for the next movement, should the negotiations prove futile. Lyttelton, with the 7th Brigade, remained at Coetzee's Drift to cover the right flank of the operations and guard the repairing of the line north of Newcastle. Kitchener, with the 8th Brigade, was brought up to Newcastle; Hildyard concentrated his division at de Wet's farm, three miles south of Ingogo, whither the 2nd Brigade was also brought up from Newcastle. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade, under Brocklehurst, was brought on the 28th May to Newcastle, where it remained till the 6th June, and then moved to de Wet's farm. On June 5, the day on which Roberts entered Pretoria, a reply was received from Botha to say that the terms were not accepted, and the armistice thereupon terminated.

Buller decides to cross the Drakensberg at Botha's Pass.

Buller had now three alternative routes of advance—to take Laing's Nek, which would entail a frontal attack upon a strongly fortified position, or to turn it on either flank.

A turning movement to the east would involve him in an extremely difficult and hilly country, and would entail crossing the Belelasberg range, which runs in an easterly direction from the Laing's Nek ridge, and then traversing a considerable extent of difficult country to the north of it. If he went round to the west he would have to begin by crossing the Drakensberg, which was a formidable obstacle, but once over it he would find himself in a country which did not present any insuperable difficulties; moreover, as the railway on leaving Volksrust turned in a north-westerly direction, this route would entail a far shorter march before he could place himself astride of the enemy's communications. Buller decided on the latter route and began his operations for crossing the Drakensberg by the much-used route of Botha's Pass near the extremity of a deep re-entrant in the face of the berg. The pass was situated about ten miles to the south-west of the Boer main position at Laing's Nek, and lay slightly south-west of the advanced British position at Ingogo. The Ingogo river, which rises in the immediate vicinity of Botha's Pass, descends into a wide basin at the foot of the pass. This basin is bounded on the north by a bold salient of the Drakensberg, the chief feature of which is Inkweloane Mountain. This in its turn is commanded by the still higher mountain of Inkwelo, four miles further north, which was then in the possession of the 4th Brigade. The western and south-western sides of the basin are formed by the re-entrant of the Drakensberg. The eastern side is partially closed by a large hill called Van Wyk, slightly higher than the Drakensberg at Botha's Pass and entirely disconnected from it. Five miles south-west of Inkweloane stands a small conical hill called Spitzkop, which though not so high as the Drakensberg, to some extent commands the approach to the pass. The peculiarity about the Drakensberg in Northern Natal is that it is only from the Natal side that it is a range. In passing from Natal into the Free State after a climb varying between 1,000 and 1,500 ft. one finds comparatively level country, the high veld of the Orange Free State being on a level with the top of the berg. Thus any position on the Natal side which commanded the top of the

Description of this pass.

berg also commanded the country beyond it. The two positions which fulfilled this condition were Van Wyk and Inkwelo, and on these two hills Buller decided to place his heavy artillery in order to bring a converging fire upon any position the enemy might take up to defend the approaches to the Drakensberg.

June 6. Hildyard occupies Van Wyk.

On June 6 Hildyard received orders to reconnoitre Van Wyk as a position for heavy guns, and he detailed the South African Light Horse, which had been under his orders since he started for Utrecht, the 13th Battery, and the Middlesex from Coke's Brigade to carry out the reconnaissance. The South African Light Horse occupied the hill with slight opposition, but the Boers on Botha's Pass, realising the importance of the hill, made a bold attempt to retake it. They climbed the south-western side on the hill and, setting fire to the grass, hotly attacked Colonel Byng, who had his men extended along the north-western crest line over a front of about three miles. Seeing from their determined efforts to retake the hill that they had no intention of letting him reoccupy it so easily a second time, if he withdrew from it now, Hildyard decided to turn the reconnaissance into a definitive occupation of the hill. After several hours' fighting the Middlesex Regiment were sent up the hill, the rest of the Brigade was brought up from de Wet's farm, and the defences were strengthened. At nightfall the Boers, who had not succeeded in making any ground, retired. Steps were at once taken to place long range guns on the hill, and by working all through the night the Naval Brigade succeeded in bringing one 12-pr. on to the summit, but broke the carriage of another. On this day the Boers reopened a desultory fire from the 6-in. gun on Pougwana and burst some shrapnel at a range of over 10,000 yards over the 4th Brigade on Inkwelo.

June 7. Buller concentrates for the attack.

June 7 was spent in concentrating the troops for the attack upon Botha's Pass. Coke's Brigade remained in occupation of Van Wyk; Wynne's Brigade and Brocklehurst's Cavalry were moved to Yellowboom Farm, on the east side of Van Wyk. Clery was left in command of the outpost lines in front of Ingogo; under him were Dartnell with the Natal Volunteers, who took Dundonald's place, and the Light

Brigade. The heavy artillery was distributed so as to command the whole Boer position: two 5-in. guns were placed on the south spur of Inkwelo, to fire on Inkweloane; the other two 5-in. guns on the south-western edge of Ingogo heights, to enfilade the Boer trenches on the Inkweloane ridge and command the approaches from Laing's Nek to Botha's Pass; on a low spur at the north-eastern corner of Van Wyk were two 4·7 guns and two 12-prs. of the Royal Garrison Artillery, and two 12-prs. of the Naval Brigade; on Van Wyk, two 4·7 guns and two 12-prs. of the Naval Brigade. The attack on the pass was to be carried out by infantry in échelon from the right, in order to conform with the shape of the hills in front of them. Hamilton's Brigade on the right, supported by the 7th and 64th Batteries and two pom-poms, was to attack the Inkweloane salient; Wynne's on the left, with the 13th and 69th Batteries, to advance across the basin and attack the northern half of the re-entrant as far as Botha's Pass. One squadron of the South African Horse was to occupy Spitzkop, the other two to cover the left of Wynne's advance, while the rest of Dundonald's Brigade was to protect the right flank of the infantry.

June 8. Buller captures Botha's Pass.

At 10 A.M. on the 8th, bombardment by the heavy guns commenced, and the South African Light Horse occupied Spitzkop without opposition. Three-quarters of an hour later Wynne began his advance and deployed in the basin. His batteries came into action and shelled the slopes of the Drakensberg. No opposition was encountered, and covered by a very heavy artillery fire, Wynne and Hamilton climbed the steep slopes of the Drakensberg. The infantry front covered about four miles, and by 3 o'clock almost simultaneously along the whole line they crowned the top of the range. Under the fire of the heavy guns, which completely commanded the crest line, the Lydenburg men had made no attempt to occupy the crest or dispute the advance of the infantry. But, as soon as the infantry reached the top, they came under a sharp fire from some of them who had secreted themselves in folds in the ground, half a mile to a mile from the crest line. The Boers brought two pom-poms and a field gun into action, and for some time there was sharp firing. They had dug some

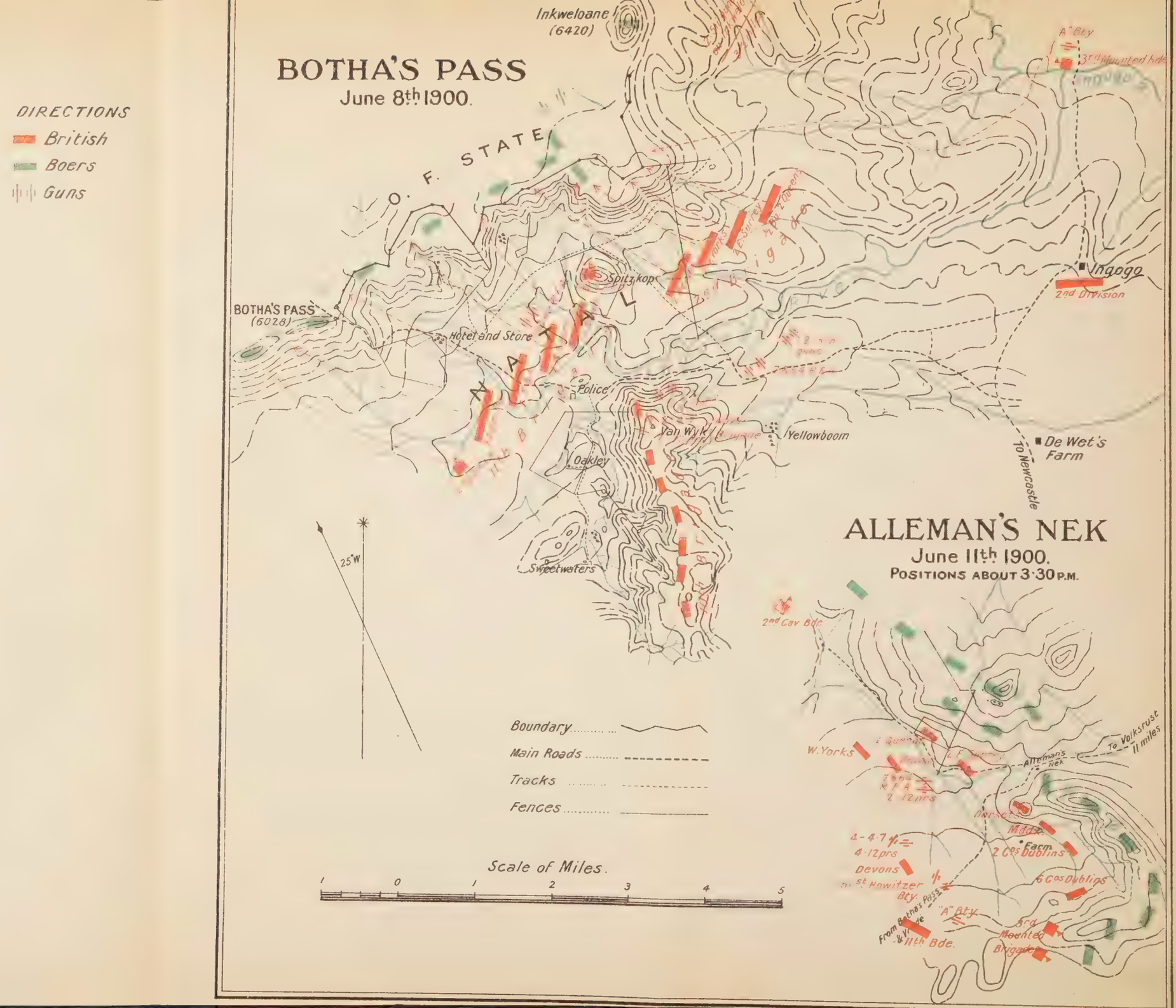
trenches along the northern side of the re-entrant, facing south, evidently not expecting an attack upon the salient. Dundonald, with Thorneycroft's and the Composite Regiment, had, however, climbed the salient at the same time as Hamilton's Brigade, and had then dragged up the Colt gun battery, a pom-pom, and two guns of "A" Battery. With these guns they enfiladed and cleared the Boer trenches. In about twenty minutes the fight had practically ceased. The Boers, according to their usual manœuvre, set fire to the grass and made good their retreat. An hour or so later Brocklehurst's Brigade was ordered up the Botha's Pass road, and advanced a few miles to the west, but failing to get in touch with the enemy, returned to the pass. The infantry bivouacked on the top of the pass and suffered greatly from the cold, as in many cases they had not even their greatcoats. The mounted troops were brought down to the foot of the hill.

This operation well planned by Buller.

The whole of this important operation, which enabled Buller to enter the Free State and turn the positions prepared by the Boers, was achieved at a cost of only twenty-six casualties on the 6th and 8th June. There is no doubt that Buller again took the Boers largely by surprise. His previous operations towards Utrecht, though futile in themselves, had led them to think that he meant to advance in that direction, with the result that he only found himself opposed by a weak force on Botha's Pass. Further, the massing of his heavy artillery in commanding positions, which had the effect of preventing the Boers from occupying the crest-line, rendered this force practically innocuous. The attack was well conceived and well carried out, and the operation deserved the success that it gained.

Its effect in driving away the Transvaalers.

On the Transvaalers the effect of the capture of Botha's Pass was immediate, for several more of the commandos which remained near Laing's Nek after the retreat from Helpmakaar, now hastened away to augment Louis Botha's forces in the neighbourhood of Pretoria. The most important of these were the Middelburg, Carolina, Zoutpansberg and Lydenburg commandos. Their few Free State comrades who had not yet retired also became anxious about the line of retreat to their own country, since they had always manifested


DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
Guns
BOTHA'S PASS
June 8th 1900.
Inkweloane (6420)
O. F. STATE
BOTHA'S PASS (6028)
Hotel and Store
Spitz kop
Police
Van Wyk
Oakley
Sweetwaters
Yellowboom
Ingogo
2nd Division
A" Bty
3rd Mounted Bde
De Wet's Farm
To Newcastle
25°W
ALLEMAN'S NEK
June 11th 1900.
POSITIONS ABOUT 3·30 P.M.
2nd Cav Bde
W. Yorks
Alleman's Nek
To Volksrust 11 miles
4-12prs
Devons
2 Cos Dublins
6 Cos Dublins
"A" Bty
3rd Mounted Brigade
From Botha's Pass & 11th Bde.
Boundary
Main Roads
Tracks
Fences
Scale of Miles.
1 0 1 2 3 4 5

a great dislike to fighting except with their backs to the Free State.

June 9 was spent in dragging the artillery and transport up Botha's Pass, an operation which was begun on the night of the 8th, and was not completed until the morning of the 10th. On the 10th Buller took the Volksrust road, which ran in a north-westerly direction, and after a march of about twelve miles entered the Transvaal at Gansvley. During the afternoon two squadrons of the South African Light Horse, who were acting as advance guard, fell upon some of the Boers who were retreating across Buller's front, consisting chiefly of men from the Lydenburg commando, who had escaped from Botha's Pass. A very sharp engagement took place, in which both sides came to close quarters. The South African Light Horse were disengaged from a difficult position with the help of the 19th Hussars and some heavy guns, but not until they had lost six killed and eight wounded. Of the Boers fourteen Lydenburgers were afterwards buried.

June 10. Buller enters the Free State.

Skirmish at Gansvley.

The position in front of Clery remained unchanged, and a desultory artillery duel between the Boer gun on Pougwana and the 5-in. gun on Inkwelo was maintained at intervals.

Clery left facing Laing's Nek.

Buller had now reached the westernmost point of his flank march. From the bivouac at the junction of the Gansvley and the Klip rivers the Volksrust road made a right-angle turn and ran north-east. At a distance of about five miles from the bivouac it passed through Alleman's Nek. From the mass of mountainous country which lies to the west of Laing's Nek, of which Majuba, Inkwelo, and Iketeni are the chief features, a long ridge protrudes in a north-westerly direction into the Transvaal. This ridge, which lay right athwart Buller's course, was unbroken save for the one deep cleft, Alleman's Nek, through which the road passed. This long spur of Iketeni was the only defensive position between Buller and the Volksrust plain, which runs north from Laing's Nek. It was on this point, therefore, that the Boers concentrated their forces, with the object of resisting Buller's flank march. As it would have meant a further flank march of some twenty miles

Buller determines to attack Alleman's Nek.

through rather broken country in order to turn the ridge, Buller decided to attack Alleman's Nek. Dundonald was ordered to scout up to the nek and locate the enemy; also to cover the right flank of the advance. Brocklehurst was placed on the left flank, the infantry and artillery advanced along the Volksrust road, and the South African Light Horse covered the rear.

June 11. Dundonald advances towards the nek.

Dundonald left the camp at 5.30 on the 11th June, and was soon in touch with small parties of the enemy, who retired before him until he reached a point about 5,000 yards from Alleman's Nek. From here the Boers could be seen busily throwing up entrenchments on both sides of the nek. At 10 A.M. "A" Battery was brought into action against them, and about an hour later the Boers returned the fire from the top of the ridge with a high velocity gun. The heavy artillery was hurried forward and dispositions for the attack were made.

Order of battle.

Talbot Coke's brigade was ordered to attack the east side of the nek, and Hamilton's brigade the west; Wynne's was kept in reserve. The heavy artillery and howitzers were to mass on the kopje where "A" Battery was now in action, and of the two Brigade Divisions, consisting of only two batteries each, one was ordered to support Hamilton's attack, while the 13th and 69th Batteries forming the other were left with Wynne. Dundonald and Brocklehurst, the former with "A" Battery, were to maintain their position on the right and left of the force respectively.

Infantry attack begins at 2.30 P.M.

The advance of the infantry was late in commencing, and it was not until 1 P.M. that the heavy artillery came into position where "A" Battery had been in action, and Dundonald moved off to the right. He at once came in contact with a considerable force of Boers who were occupying a small spur which runs south-eastward from the main ridge. On the extreme left, nearly seven miles from where Dundonald was in action, Brocklehurst also became engaged. At about 1.30 the whole of the artillery began to bombard the ridge. An hour later the infantry attack, which had been timed to start at 1.45, began to develop. The hills on the west of the nek, which were Hamilton's objective,

were steep and high, and, although they contained several krantzes which afforded excellent cover to the enemy, offered no commanding features upon which to concentrate the attack. The hills in front of Coke, on the other hand, were more broken. Right in the mouth of the nek, acting as a bastion to the hills he had to attack, stood a steep, conical hill which commanded the nek, and made a *point d'appui* for attacking the eastern side of it. Coke placed the Dorsets and the Dublin Fusiliers in the firing line with orders to the Dorsets to attack and occupy the conical hill, and to the Dublins to move on their right and assist the Dorsets by outflanking the hill upon the east side. The Middlesex he placed in support. Hamilton had the East Surreys on the right of his firing line, and the Queen's on the left of it, with the West Yorks in support. Half a battalion of Devons were detached to occupy a small kopje covering the left flank of the advance, and half remained with the heavy guns.

Across open ground.

The ground across which the advance had to be made was absolutely open, without a vestige of cover, and the Boer position had all the appearance of being practically impregnable against an ordinary frontal attack. Under fire of the howitzers the Boers had withdrawn the high-velocity gun with which they had shelled "A" Battery earlier in the day, and it was not until the infantry came within extreme rifle range that they opened upon them with the whole of their artillery, and at the same time commenced a very heavy musketry fire. They had two high-velocity guns, and two pom-poms, all admirably concealed, and after firing a few preliminary shots at the little knoll upon which the heavy artillery was in action, and upon which Buller and Hildyard and their respective staffs were seated, they devoted their attention entirely to the advancing infantry. The guns were admirably served, and the shell-fire was heavy, but quite inadequate effectively to check the advance.

The Dublins seize the hill at the entrance of the pass.

On the right Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry and the Composite Regiment under Gough were heavily engaged on the spur of the main ridge, and as the Dublins deployed on the right of Coke's line they also came under a very sharp

flanking fire from the same ridge. The result was that they diverted their attack from their proper objective and began to move off to their right front. Coke attempted to stop them, but only two companies continued the advance upon the main ridge, the remaining six companies having gone off towards the spur. Meanwhile in the valley the fire was getting rapidly heavier, and the Boer fire, which was evidently at well-marked ranges, was becoming rather deadly. Nevertheless, the Dorsets advanced with great rapidity. As they came nearer the ridge, grass fires sprang up in several places. The wind was blowing towards the nek, and the accuracy of the Boer fire was at once destroyed. Fixing bayonets the Dorsets rushed the conical hill and established themselves firmly upon it, though they had to go without the assistance that Coke intended they should have from the flanking movement of the Dublins. They climbed to the top of the conical hill, which was rugged and gave them good cover, and opened a heavy fire upon the main ridge, which was separated from them by a strip of two or three hundred yards of open ground. Hamilton's advance had not been so rapid, as the fire from the krantzes in front of him was extremely heavy, and when the East Surreys approached the mouth of the nek they became a mark for the riflemen, who were sheltered from the artillery fire on the part of the ridge immediately behind the conical hill.

Excellent use made by Buller of his artillery.

It was at this stage of the battle, when the infantry had advanced within deadly range, that for a time the fortunes of the day hung in the balance. Admirably as the massed batteries were doing their work, and although they had silenced one or two of the Boer guns, they had not to any appreciable degree succeeded in stemming the fire of the great mass of unshaken Boer riflemen lying amongst the rocks on the top and sides of the ridge. The firing was, if anything, growing heavier, and the infantry, who were for the most part without cover, could make no headway against it. Then it was that Buller completed the perfect co-operation between artillery and infantry, which was the most noteworthy feature of this battle. He sent forward Hamilton's two field batteries, the 7th and 64th, and two

12-prs., and made them take ground to the left. From their new position they poured a terrific slanting fire across the north-west side of the conical hill, which had hitherto sheltered the east side of the nek. Coke, whose Dublins were by this time quite out of reach, threw six companies of his supporting battalion—the Middlesex—into the firing line on the right of the Dorsets. The heavy guns redoubled their efforts. The Boer fire slackened, and in went Coke's brigade for the final charge. With bayonets fixed the Dorsets leapt down the far side of the conical hill and swept across the open beyond. Men fell thick for a few moments, but the rush carried everything before it. The Boers, as usual, did not wait for the charge to get home, and at 5 o'clock the last beams of the setting sun glinted on the bayonets of the Dorsets as, led by Captain Rowley, they crowned the heights of the eastern side of the nek. The Queen's and East Surreys had by this time gained the western ridge. The whole line then scrambled up the summit and poured a long-range fire into the retreating Boers, who galloped away under cover of the grass fires. The nek captured.

The fight was continued longest on the extreme right. Dundonald had attacked the spur with the Composite Regiment and two companies of Thorneycroft's M.I., assisted by the Dublins, who came up during his attack. He succeeded in turning the Boers out of their first position and driving them back into some sangars on the main ridge. But the main position was too strong to capture with so small a force. Dundonald remained in action until dusk, when the Boers in the centre having retired, those in front of him evacuated their position and retreated. Dundonald keeps up the fight a little longer.

The total casualties for the day were 19 killed and 123 wounded, of which 91 were in the 10th Brigade, 64 of these being in the Dorset Regiment, and 46 in the 2nd Brigade among the Queens and East Surreys. The Boer casualties were reported to have been heavy, which is highly probable, as they were practically without trenches, and the shell-fire, especially that of the lyddite, which is always most deadly amongst rocks, was heavy and very well aimed. Casualties.

By the time that the position had been entirely occupied it was quite dark. Considerable difficulty was experienced No pursuit.

in carrying down the wounded and in getting food and great-coats to the victorious troops. No attempt was made to follow up the victory that night.

Victory of Alleman's Nek decisive,

The victory of Alleman's Nek was decisive. Buller had gained a position almost in the rear of the main Boer position of Laing's Nek, with no other defensive position between it and the railway, which was not more than eight miles further away. He could scarcely have found himself better placed for cutting the main line of communication of the Boers who were still in Natal. But he seems to have failed just as completely to realise on this occasion, as he did after Pieter's Hill, what the strategical effect of his victory would be upon the enemy. He telegraphed to Clery that he hoped in two days' time to be able to attack Laing's Nek, and he did not seem to understand that with Alleman's Nek in his hands the Boers must of necessity evacuate Laing's Nek, and that in all probability a large number of them and the greater portion of their heavy baggage would retreat across his front. The unfortunate delays which prevented the infantry attack from developing until 2.30 in the afternoon, though they had marched only five miles from their bivouac of the night before, and the consequent lateness of the hour at which the victory was achieved, would have necessitated any further movement that night being carried out under cover of darkness. The night was admirably suited for any such enterprise as that attempted by Major Hunter-Weston at Bloemfontein and Kroonstad, had such an idea entered Buller's head, and in this case it offered more prospect of success. In fact, the destruction of a culvert somewhere between Volksrust and Sandspruit ought not to have been a difficult achievement, and should have resulted, if promptly followed up by Clery as well as by himself, in the capture of artillery or transport.

but its importance not realised by Buller.

The Boers make good their escape.

The darkness proved invaluable to the Boers, and under cover of it a general retreat took place. They removed all their guns, including even the big Creusot, which they succeeded in bringing down from Pougwana during the night. This gun with three others was taken up to rejoin the main Boer force on the Delagoa Bay line. Six guns and five pom-

poms were kept by the Wakkerstroon, Utrecht, and Swaziland commandos and a few disorganised bands, that retired either to the east or to Grasnek, due north of Volksrust.

June 12. Laing's Nek evacuated, and Buller occupies Volksrust.

At 8 o'clock on June 12 Buller resumed his advance along the Volksrust road. About four miles from Alleman's Nek, where the road debouched into the Volksrust plain, the South African Light Horse, who were advance-guard for the day, came in touch with a few small parties of the enemy. Some guns were brought into action and the Boers driven off, and at 11 o'clock the railway some four miles above Volksrust was in Buller's hands, when it was too late to prevent the Boers from removing a considerable part of their heavy transport and baggage. At about the same hour Dartnell reconnoitred Laing's Nek and found it evacuated. Clery moved up the 4th Brigade and occupied it, and Dartnell scouted as far as Charlestown, whilst a patrol of Buller's occupied Volksrust. Buller bivouacked for the night at Joubert's farm, between Alleman's Nek and Volksrust, after a march of about seven miles. On the 13th Wynne's Brigade moved to Volksrust, Coke's and Hamilton's and the 2nd Cavalry Brigade to Charlestown; the 4th Brigade remained at Laing's Nek. Wakkerstroom was surrendered to Lyttelton, the commandos retiring to the hills on his approach.

Buller's progress very slow.

Thus Buller occupied his first town in the Transvaal a week after Roberts had arrived in Pretoria. During the time that Roberts had marched 300 miles Buller had covered little more than half that distance.* He was in fact so far behind

* The marches of Buller's headquarters from May 7 to June 12 are as follows:—

		Miles
May	7. Ladysmith to Modder Spruit (Buy's Farm)	7
,,	8. Halt.	
,,	9. To Cornelius Pieter's Farm	4
,,	10. To Sunday's River drift	11
,,	11. To Waschbank River	9
,,	12. To Vermaak's Kraal	10
,,	13. To Uithoek Nek	9
,,	14. To Beith	21
,,	15. To Dundee	10
	Carried forward	81

the main army that the chief effect of his advance on the general scheme of operations was to give the Boers in Natal leisure to transfer commandos to oppose Lord Roberts's advance, instead of being held fast by the task in front of them. This delay was partly due to the deliberate manner in which Buller advanced. He started late for Helpmakaar, and after dispersing the Boers from the Biggarsberg, it was nearly a month before he made his next attack on them at Botha's Pass. It is true he was obliged to mend the railway as he went on, but the railway staff were so efficient that in no single instance were they longer than six days in mending a break. But even granting that his progress through Natal was as fast as possible, the probability is that the delay in reaching the Transvaal would have been less if he had adopted the bolder course of a flank movement by Van Reenen's Pass which he himself once suggested, and of which Lord Roberts approved. At this stage of the war the Boers were no longer anxious to invade or hold British territory, as they were only too nervous about their own communications, and the defence of their own country. A constantly diminishing remnant stayed in Natal as long as Buller was advancing through it, not so much for the purpose of holding their conquest as to delay Buller's junction with Roberts within their own borders. This remnant would probably have melted away altogether

		Miles.
	Brought forward	81
May 16.	Halt.	
„ 17.	To Dannhauser	17
„ 18.	To Newcastle	21
„ 19.	To Ingogo River	12
„ 20. to June 5.	Halt. (Expedition to Utrecht and the East by Lyttelton and Hildyard.)	
„ 6. „ 7.	To Van Wyk	8
„ 8.	To Botha's Pass	6
„ 9.	Halt.	
„ 10.	To Gansvley	13
„ 11.	To Alleman's Nek	10
„ 12.	To Volksrust	12
		180

BULLER'S ADVANCE THROUGH NATAL.

MAY-JUNE 1900

Scale 1/601920; 9½ miles = 1 inch

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 5 10 15

DIRECTIONS

Route of Buller's force

" " Lyttelton's "

" " Hildyard's "

" " Bethune's column

Boers

Boer Laager

Guns

THE BOER POSITIONS

(a) On the Biggarsberg are those held up to May 13th.

(b) North of Newcastle are those held from May 19th-June 8th.

Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London

if Buller had left a containing force opposite the Biggarsberg, cleared Van Reenen's Pass, repaired the railway to Harrismith, and then advanced through Vrede upon Standerton. The transport would have been a difficulty to Buller, but Roberts's similar advance on Bloemfontein showed that the difficulty was not insurmountable.

But otherwise operations well carried out.

Apart from the delay, the actual details of Buller's battles were better carried out than at any other period of his campaign. His operations round Helpmakaar were admirably planned and executed, and the battle of Alleman's Nek was fought with a skill and vigour, the brilliancy of which could not be obscured even by the subsequent failure to use the victory to its full advantage.

CHAPTER VI

THE WESTERN ADVANCE AND THE RELIEF OF MAFEKING

Mafeking still unrelieved when Roberts occupied Bloemfontein.

MAFEKING, it will be remembered, was the only one of the three towns invested at the beginning of the war which had not been relieved when Roberts entered Bloemfontein. Moreover, Kimberley, the furthest point to the north then reached on the western line, was still 220 miles distant from Baden-Powell's little garrison. The Commander-in-Chief had always reckoned that the relief would be effected almost automatically, as the Boers found themselves forced to leave all their other occupations and oppose his further advance. But as his own departure and that of the converging columns were delayed from week to week, he began to see that a special expedition would be necessary to set free Baden-Powell. From the outset, it is true, Plumer's small force had been gradually working its way towards Mafeking, but its strength was insufficient to drive away Snyman without further assistance.

I

Colonel Plumer's operations north of Mafeking.

Mention has already been made in earlier volumes * of Colonel Plumer's operations during the first two months of the war, but it is worth while dealing with them briefly as a whole, as they were not only very interesting in themselves, but had a very important bearing on the long defence which Mafeking was able to make.

His orders from Baden-Powell, Oct. 10, 1899.

The last and only orders which Plumer received before the relief of Mafeking were those from Colonel Baden-Powell which he found on his arrival at Tuli on October 10, 1899.

* See vol. ii., pp. 101, 133-5, 270, 271, 297, 298, and also vol. iii., p. 100.

These were—"(1) To defend the border as far as it can be carried out from the neighbourhood of Tuli as a centre; (2) by a display of strength to induce the Boers to detail a strong force to protect their northern district; (3) to create a diversion in the north of the Transvaal, co-operating with the invasion of the south by our main force, if necessary advancing into the Transvaal for the purpose; no portion of your forces is to cross the frontier till you receive orders; instructions will be sent to you as to the date for co-operation with the other column." He had to wait seven months before he heard any tidings of a column from the south, but he determined, as his immediate superior was shut up in Mafeking, to act for the best on his own responsibility.

Task before Plumer.

It was very soon obvious that there was no immediate prospect of his being required to assist a force invading the Transvaal, but the task he found himself called upon to perform was none the less difficult with the slender means at his disposal. He had in the first place to defend Rhodesia, and secondly, if not strong enough to relieve, at any rate to reduce the pressure on Mafeking.

Danger of an invasion of Rhodesia.

The defence of Rhodesia seemed at first sight the more formidable undertaking of the two. In the early optimistic stage of the war it was expected that the Boers, driven up by the victorious British armies from the Transvaal, would trek into Rhodesia, either to escape or to create a diversion; and the 500 miles from Mafeking to the north-eastern point of the Transvaal was a considerable extent of frontier to guard against such a contingency. Then, apart from the danger of a Boer invasion, the Rhodesian settlers had still very vividly before them the terrible native rising of 1896, and were by no means free from anxiety lest the tribes might again rebel if they saw their conquerors in trouble. This anxiety was stimulated by threatening language in July about the hut tax from a tribe near Victoria, which had hitherto been loyal. Even the loyalty of the four great Bechuana chiefs between Mafeking and Rhodesia could not absolutely be relied upon. Khama, indeed, chief of the Bamangwatos, whose capital was at Palapye, was an enlightened and zealous admirer of the English, but his tribe was

Uncertainty as to loyalty of the natives.

unwarlike and might be cowed into submission by a display of force from the Boers. Bathoen, chief of the Bangwaketsi, with his capital at Kanya, though also loyal, was also weak. The third, Sebele, had a sub-tribe of questionable loyalty established at Gaberones on the railway. The fourth was Linchwe, whose tribe of Bakhatlas were good fighters; his territory extended on both sides of the Marico River, and lay partly in the Transvaal and partly in British Bechuanaland, his capital Mochudi being in the latter. His interests, even in peace time, therefore, pulled him two ways; at the beginning of the war his loyalty to the English was very doubtful, and it was chiefly due to a foolish attack by the Boers on his territory that it became confirmed. Luckily, too, these natives had for nearly ten years enjoyed the protection of England under the wise administration of Major H. Goold Adams and his sub-commissioner, Mr. Surmon, so that in the end their loyalty stood the test. Still, as long as there was any doubt whether the Bechuanas would assist the Boers in the passage through their territories, Rhodesia could not feel secure from invasion by the south-west. Equally important, too, was it for the purpose of keeping in touch with Mafeking that these natives should be supported in their loyalty by as large a display of force as possible; and it soon became obvious that, besides the force at Tuli, it was necessary to have troops working down the line towards Mafeking. Nevertheless the rule that the natives should take no active part in this war was observed, and the small amount of ammunition allowed them was given solely for the purpose of enabling them to guard their own territory against invasions.*

Plumer's forces.

The total forces available for Colonel Plumer to safeguard Rhodesia and to carry the war against the Boers were very small. They consisted of the Rhodesian Regiment † raised by Plumer in August, numbering about 420 men,

* The attack by Linchwe's men at Derdepoort on November 25 has already been referred to in vol. ii., p. 298. The attack was contrary to strict orders, and on its occurrence Colonel Holdsworth immediately suspended his own attack. See below, p. 204.

† This force was composed chiefly of men recruited at Port Elizabeth and other Cape ports, though one squadron under Colonel Spreckley was made up of Rhodesians.

about 600 of the British South Africa Police in Matabeleland, and the South Rhodesian Volunteers,* who at the highest point numbered about 800, besides about 250 Volunteers and 380 B.S.A. Police in Mashonaland. Altogether there was a force of barely 2,500 to defend a territory more than twice as large as England and Wales, besides creating diversions to relieve Mafeking. The deficiency in artillery was even more striking; the only guns available in the whole country until May were three 2·5-inch guns, two 7-pounders, one 12½-pounder Vickers-Maxim,† and eight Gatlings and Maxims, all under Captain Hoël Llewellyn.

Excellent co-operation of the Rhodesian officials.

But, although the problem seemed a difficult one, the enthusiasm and organizing ability displayed in Rhodesia materially aided Plumer's task. In Colonel Nicholson, the commandant-general of the B.S.A.P., Rhodesia was lucky in having a patriotic and foreseeing administrator, who arranged before the outbreak of hostilities to have sufficient supplies in the country to last the whole white population for eight months, partly by buying large supplies for the police, and partly by persuading the storekeepers to fill up their magazines, while he supplemented these at a later period by stores brought through Beira. In spite, therefore, of the closing of the regular source of supply through Mafeking, the country was never in any danger of starvation. It was also chiefly due to Colonel Nicholson, ably seconded by Captain Anderson, the assistant-controller of the British South Africa Company, that Plumer's Rhodesian Regiment was equipped so completely and so quickly as to be able to take the field with two months' training behind it. The danger of native trouble in Rhodesia itself was also, no doubt,

* It was not till July that the High Commissioner allowed the enrolment of Volunteers in this regiment, which was first under the command of Colonel Spreckley. When he went off to the Rhodesian Regiment, Colonel Holdsworth, of the 7th Hussars, assumed the command.

† This gun was one of the two 75 mm. guns purchased by Dr. Jameson for his Raid. This one, however, had been left behind in Buluwayo, owing to the non-arrival of its carriage; it thus escaped the fate of its sister-gun, which was captured by the Boers at Doornkop in 1896. The two guns met again on opposite sides of the Metse Mashoane Valley in February 1900, as Von Dalwig had one of them and Plumer the other.

averted by the wise measures taken by Captain the Hon. A. Lawley, the administrator of Matabeleland, who personally explained to the chiefs the causes of the war and enjoined on them the necessity of remaining quiet. As a result, no difficulty arose from that quarter except for an insignificant disturbance in the north in 1900, which was promptly suppressed. But not the least valuable contribution which Rhodesia made was in the willing service rendered by the settlers. As soon as they were allowed, they volunteered with the utmost enthusiasm, as may be judged from the fact that, counting those who enlisted in the Rhodesian Regiment and other corps, Rhodesia sent 1,500 men to the front, or 12½ per cent. of its white population. Most of these were men who had already had good experience in fighting against natives and the other perils of a new country, and they showed an independence and self-reliance especially valuable in so small a force. Other interesting features of the Rhodesian Volunteers were the cyclist corps organized under Lieutenant Duly by Colonel Holdsworth, which did excellent and often perilous work in keeping up communications with distant camps, like Kanya and Sefetili, and the three armoured trains fitted up in the railway workshops in Buluwayo, which seem to have been much more effective than those engines of war were in other parts of the field of operations.

Oct.–Dec., 1899. Plumer's operations round Tuli.

The course of events round Tuli during the last three months of 1899 may be briefly summarized. With a force of only 500 men * Plumer conveyed the impression to the Boers that he had 1,400, and, though the Boer force south of the Limpopo, consisting of the Zoutpansberg commando,† must have numbered over 1,000 men, they never dared to do more than skirmish across the river and retire again. Up till October 21 Plumer held positions commanding Rhodes and Pont Drifts, about twenty-five miles from Tuli, and had various skirmishes with the Boers; on that day and on the

* 420 of Rhod. Regt. and 80 of B.S.A.P., with 12½-pounder, one 2·5-inch gun, and two Maxims.

† In command on the Boer side were Sarel Eloff, the German artillery officer Von Dalwig, and Field-Cornets Briel and Barend Vorster, the latter a notorious member of the 1st Volksraad; they had one Nordenfelt gun and two pom-poms.

23rd more serious engagements took place, in which the English lost an officer and ten men and retired on Tuli and Macloutsie. On the 26th October, however, on the Boers retiring across the river, Rhodes Drift was again occupied, together with a point at the junction of the Macloutsie and Limpopo rivers, to prevent a Boer incursion on Buluwayo through the Dutch-speaking district of Mangwe. Another attack on November 2, under Eloff and Von Dalwig, on the Rhodes Drift position and on a small supply column at Bryce's store, five miles off, forced Plumer to move back again on Tuli. Then for three weeks the Boers were in possession of the drifts across the Limpopo and of Bryce's store, but they took no advantage of this, and finally retired about November 20 across the Brak River in a southerly direction. All this time information as to the Boer movements was being reported to Plumer by daily patrols and by native scouts sent out by his intelligence officers. But, not content with this, on December 1 Plumer himself conducted a reconnaisance into the Transvaal, and found no trace of Boers for thirty-five miles. After a second reconnaisance on December 19, in which he went as far as Wegdraai on the Brak River, with a similar result, he decided that it would be quite safe to leave only small forces of 120 men with a 12½-pounder at Tuli and of twenty men at Macloutsie, and to take part himself in the more important operations on the railway line. Accordingly, on December 27 he took the rest of the Tuli force, amounting by this time to about 400 men with a 2·5-inch gun and a Maxim, to Palapye, reaching it on the last day of the year. This move was, no doubt, the obvious thing to do, as the Boers had left the neighbourhood of the Limpopo, but a less bold leader than Plumer might have been afraid to take the responsibility of leaving Tuli, where he had been instructed to stay, while there was still a chance that the Boers might return for the invasion of Rhodesia.

Operations on the railway during the same period.

While Plumer was at Tuli the operations down the line towards Mafeking had been directed by Colonel Nicholson from Buluwayo. It will be remembered that the Boer forces detached by Cronje from Mafeking were part of the Marico

and Rustenburg commandos, under General Van Rensburg and Commandants Piet Kruger, Du Plessis, Swart, and Louw. These were at Lobatsi and at Derdepoort, near Mochudi. Another detachment of the Marico commando, under Grobler, was near Selika Kop, on the Limpopo River. Until Plumer came up the British were not strong enough to do much more than patrol the railway with armoured trains, which, as has already been noted,* succeeded in doing a little damage to the Boers and in drawing off some of the assailants of Mafeking. But during October and November the Boers forced the British to take their railway line base further and further north, almost as far as Magalapye, 200 miles from Mafeking. On November 6 Colonel Holdsworth was sent down to Magalapye with about 200 of the Volunteers and police, and a little later a force of 300 to Mangwe to guard against an invasion by Grobler. Grobler had already made proposals to Khama to let him come up through Palapye to Buluwayo, and on Khama's refusal he bombarded the natives' kraal at Selika Kop, which they had previously vacated; but the expedition to Buluwayo never came to anything. On November 25 Colonel Holdsworth† took about 130 of his men to attack the Boer laager at Derdepoort, in the Transvaal, as the commandos had been raiding Linchwe's cattle from the Kaffir "stad" Sekwani across the border.‡ The attack had begun successfully, but unfortunately Linchwe's Kaffirs, who had been strictly enjoined not to come over the Transvaal border, joined in the attack, and Colonel Holdsworth immediately drew off his troops. Next month Du Plessis, reinforced by some of the northern commando under Eloff and Von Dalwig and by 200 men under Commandant Louw from Mafeking, took revenge on Linchwe by attacking and destroying his stad of Sekwani and by threatening Mochudi. But Colonel Holdsworth was creeping down the line again, and by the beginning of January had taken

* See vol. ii., p. 270.

† Colonel Holdsworth, not Captain Llewellyn as is stated in vol. ii., p. 298, was in command of the English force here. Otherwise see that account for further details of this engagement.

‡ Commandant Du Plessis himself was away at the time from the Boer laager.

railhead to within four miles of Crocodile Pools and eighty-seven from Mafeking.

Jan., 1900. Plumer's position on the railway.

In the middle of January, when Plumer had established his headquarters at Gaberones, the position north of Mafeking was as follows: Grobler had left the neighbourhood of Selika Kop, and the only Boer forces remaining were those at Derdepoort and Sekwani, said to have been about 1,000 strong, and a smaller one under Swart and Von Dalwig, with a 12½-pounder,* on a line of kopjes astride the railway about five miles south of Crocodile Pools station and commanding the bridge which the Boers had destroyed over the Metse Mashoane river; Plumer had about 750 men, with one 2·5-inch gun, a 7-pounder, and two Maxims, distributed between Gaberones, Gaberones Fort two and a half miles south, and his advanced camp, which was under shelter of some kopjes near Crocodile Pools station; at the end of the month the 12½-pounder, which had been left at Tuli, and another 2·5-inch gun from Buluwayo, were brought down to him.

Feb., 1900. Plumer at Crocodile Pools.

Plumer's first care was to have the railway-bridge below Crocodile Pools repaired. This was a dangerous undertaking, as the working party were exposed to the fire of the Boer gun, but it was successfully accomplished by the railway Volunteers under cover of gun fire. On February 12, after a daily exchange of fairly harmless fire between the guns on the advanced British and Boer positions, Plumer ordered a night attack on the Boers by Major Bird and some 200 of the Rhodesian Regiment, B.S.A. Police, and South Rhodesian Volunteers, with the idea of driving them out of the position and destroying their gun. The Boers, however, were quite prepared for them, and had mines and barbed-wire entanglements, besides natural cover of brushwood on the last slope of the kopje, so that they could shoot down the foremost of their assailants at their leisure, and Bird had to return unsuccessful with five killed, among whom was Captain French†

* See note † *supra*, p. 201.

† French was shot by Von Dalwig himself, who afterwards put up a cairn and cross to his memory with the simple superscription written in Dutch and English:

"Captain French.
Here lies a gallant officer."

who gallantly led the assault, and twenty-four wounded. On the 16th the Boers, reinforced from Mafeking, advanced in some strength to try a counter-stroke, but as they could not agree on a plan of attack they retired after a slight skirmish. But Plumer's resources were not exhausted in an attempt to push away the Boers simply by a descent down the line, and he had already determined to have an alternative route for reaching Mafeking by working round to the west. On February 13 he started a base for supplies at Kanya, Bathoen's capital, about forty miles south-west of Crocodile Pools. For the next month, however, he contented himself with establishing supplies there, for the Boers, shortly after their abortive attack, evacuated the Crocodile Pools position so as to take part in the assault on Mafeking of February 28. Plumer was excellently served by his intelligence staff under Captain Smitheman, a well-known hunter who had served as a scout in the Matabele War of 1896. He was therefore enabled to take immediate advantage of their retreat, and by March 6 he had his trains running down to Lobatsi, only forty-five miles from Mafeking. On the following day Major Bird captured a Boer laager near Gopani ten miles to the east. Not content with this, Plumer, on discovering that all the Boer forces except 200 or 300 were concentrated round Mafeking, pushed forward reconnoitring forces with the object of drawing away from it as many Boers as possible. On the 13th March Major Bird, with 200 men, struck out west to Korwe Kopje, and then turned south as far as Ramathlabama, only fifteen miles from Mafeking, while about 300 men of the B.S.A. Police and of the Rhodesian Regiment, with three maxims and a 2½-pounder, were sent down under Colonel Bodle to Pitsani. On the 14th, however, Snyman brought up most of his forces round Mafeking to push back the intruder, and, combining with Swart's force from the east, attacked Bodle's camp. Bodle was driven back with a few casualties to Lobatsi, which the Boers proceeded to shell with their 12½-pounder and a pom-pom. Plumer recalled Bird, but, finding Lobatsi difficult to defend, especially as it could easily be turned from the north, he determined to leave that

Feb. 13. Kanya made a base for supplies.

March. Expeditions towards Mafeking

position. It was now that his foresight in storing supplies at Kanya was rewarded, for, instead of having simply to retreat back again to Crocodile Pools, he sent off his mounted troops to Kanya and only moved his supply base up the line. Leaving a few troops and guns on some hills in front of Lobatsi to cover his movements, all through the night of the 15th and during the 16th he worked hard at conveying all his stores and unmounted men up to Crocodile Pools and Gaberones. The last train-load started off at 10 P.M. on the 16th, shortly followed by Major Bird's men, who had been keeping off the Boers at the outposts. Next morning the armoured train went down the line and discovered that the Boers had been vigorously shelling the deserted positions at Lobatsi; meanwhile 550 mounted men, with two guns and a maxim, under Plumer himself, were well on their way to Kanya, and the remaining 350 men and two guns were safely laagered at Crocodile Pools.

March 16. Plumer moves to Kanya.

The Boers appear to have been thoroughly nonplussed by these manœuvres, as they did not even damage the line above Lobatsi, but retired back again to Mafeking. Plumer moved forward his camp to Sefetili, where there were a few pans on the edge of the desert, thirty-six miles from Kanya and thirty from Mafeking, and kept up his communication with the base at Gaberones * by cyclists' posts at Mashupa, Kanya, and Moshwane. His supplies were brought as far as Kanya by wagons hired from Bathoen, and thence by the Government wagons. From Sefetili, on March 26, he carried out a reconnaissance into the Transvaal nearly as far as Zeerust, in order to distract the attention of the Boers; and on the 30th he moved down with 270 mounted men to Ramathlabama. On the 31st he was within six miles of Mafeking, but was driven back again to Ramathlabama by a large force of Boers of the Rustenburg and Marico commandos, under Commandants Snyman and Steenekamp, reinforced by some Boers from Fourteen Streams under Commandant Stein. His casualties were eight killed, twenty-nine wounded (including himself), and eleven prisoners. However, the Boers, who claimed to have only had three

March 16–31, Plumer advances towards Mafeking.

* The base was later moved further south to Ootsi.

casualties, allowed him to retire to Sefetili without further pursuit.

April. Plumer helps in escape of natives from Mafeking.

During the next month Plumer's efforts were confined to assisting in the escape of Kaffirs from Mafeking—and it was a considerable help to the garrison that he was able to feed 1,200 of them, who thus reached him through the Boer lines —also to an attempt at sending slaughter cattle into the town, which was not so successful, as most of them were intercepted by the Boers. He offered, indeed, to make an attack on the Boer trenches, but Baden-Powell thought the risk was too great for Plumer's small force, especially as there was a column known to be coming up from the south, and the garrison still had food for another two months. On

May. Plumer reinforced.

May 1, 200 of the Mashonaland division of the B.S.A.P. and another 2·5-inch gun reinforced him at Sefetili, and on the 14th "C" battery of the Royal Canadian Artillery, with an escort of 100 Queenslanders, arrived by a forced march from Beira.*

May 15. Plumer meets Mafeking relief column at Jan Massibi.

On the previous day he had received a message by runner to announce the approach of a Mafeking relief column from the south, so, as soon as the battery arrived, he marched out to join forces with it at Jan Massibi on May 15.

Importance of Plumer's operations.

Plumer's operations for the defence of Rhodesia and the relief of Mafeking are certainly the most interesting and instructive of the minor operations carried on during the first year of the war. With a force always at a numerical disadvantage to his opponents, containing no Regular troops and very few Regular officers, working all the time on the borders of the enemy's country, with miserably inefficient artillery and constant anxiety for supplies, he succeeded by daring, which never exceeded the limits of due precaution, in stopping most effectually any attempt against Rhodesia and in dissipating the energies of the force arrayed against Mafeking. His timely trek from Tuli, and his unexpected diversion to Kanya and Sefetili, are remarkable instances of military judgment, and the chorus of approval which greeted the defenders of Mafeking might justly have been diverted in part to the patient worker for its relief. And he was well supported, as is always the case with good commanders.

* See chap. x., p. 369.

The authorities of the British South Africa Company at Buluwayo, especially Colonel Nicholson and his subordinates, contributed largely to his success by their zeal in overcoming the supply difficulties. The special service officers, who assisted him in organizing the troops and afterwards in commanding them, had been well chosen, and that they bore the brunt of the fighting is testified by the fact that, of ten altogether, four were killed, two crippled by wounds, and two others wounded. The Volunteers, the police, and the Rhodesian Regiment not only endured manfully the long waits, the constant movements up and down the line, and the serious sickness in the unhealthy country along the Bechuanaland border, but responded well to the frequent calls made on them for extra exertions.

II

Methuen at Kimberley.

South of Mafeking, Lord Methuen's was the only force left on the western line when Lord Roberts arrived at Bloemfontein. By that time Methuen had already moved his headquarters from Modder River to Kimberley, on a level with the main army. Here, as at Bloemfontein, much preparation was needed before Lord Methuen could advance, while apart from this Lord Roberts had no wish to send the flank forward before he was ready himself.

Re-organization and transport.

The infantry of Lord Methuen's division had in the middle of February been reduced to Douglas's 9th Brigade, and it was not till towards the end of March that a second brigade under Colonel Arthur Paget was re-constituted for him, chiefly by means of Militia regiments, which arrived at Cape Town in the course of the month.* Moreover, his troops, like those in Bloemfontein, were weakened by illness;

* The 9th Brigade under Major-General Douglas, as finally constituted, was composed of 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, 1st Loyal North Lancashires, 3rd South Wales Borderers, 2nd Northamptonshire Regiment, the 20th under Major-General Paget, 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, 1st Royal Munster Fusiliers, 4th South Staffordshire Regiment, and 4th Scottish Rifles.

When Methuen's new division was completed about the beginning of May it also included the 3rd, 5th, 10th, and 15th battalions of Imperial Yeomanry, the 11th Company R.E., and the 4th, 20th, and 38th R.F.A. Batteries, the 37th Howitzer Battery, and a section of pom-poms.

thus on March 22 there were 597 men in hospital at Kimberley, of whom 234 were enteric cases. It is true that the railway as far as Kimberley, though damaged north of the Modder River, was very soon repaired, and that the line was a much shorter and more direct route from Cape Town than that from Cape Town to Bloemfontein. Thus the question of supplies at his base was never one that troubled Methuen very greatly; even on March 13 he had collected supplies for 38,000 men for a fortnight and for 22,000 animals for three weeks, and there was nothing to interfere with his adding to this store. But the question of transport was more difficult. Lord Roberts, when he first came up to Kimberley, was very short of transport wagons himself; so he ordered Lord Methuen to send all the transport he could to join the main army. Thanks partly to the powerful co-operation of Mr. Rhodes, and partly to the large stock of private wagons still in Kimberley, Lord Methuen's capable supply officer, Colonel Winter, was able to get together sufficient transport for his own division and for a flying column subsequently formed under Colonel Mahon, besides assisting the main army.

Boers on the Western line.

The Boers on the western line seem for the most part to have been reduced to much the same state of passive inaction as in other parts of the field of operations by Lord Roberts's successful occupation of Bloemfontein; but they were in sufficient numbers to bar a rapid advance. General Snyman was still wasting the energies of his men round Mafeking, and further north Commandant Du Plessis was vainly trying to obstruct Plumer's elusive movements; between them they had about 2,000 men; Generals Andries Cronje and Du Toit, with forces amounting to another 2,000, were holding the drifts over the Vaal at Christiana and Fourteen Streams respectively, so as to block the way into the Transvaal and towards Mafeking from the south.* To the west, in Cape Colony

* General Cronje had originally 1,100 men with a Krupp and a pom-pom, and was afterwards reinforced by the Johannesburg police under Van Dam.

Du Toit had 600 men, including the 400 of Stein's commando who occasionally made a flying excursion north of Mafeking to join forces with Du Plessis against Plumer.

itself, although Lord Kitchener's Prieska expedition had driven up most of the rebels and their Transvaal allies across the Orange River, the whole of Griqualand was still in their possession; Liebenberg was near Barkly West, only twenty miles north-west of Kimberley, with about 200 Transvaalers, and there were over 1,000 armed rebels in the neighbourhood of Griquatown and Campbell.

March 11. Boshof occupied.

During the month of March there was little opportunity for more than the preparation of supplies and transport, and the repair of the railway towards Fourteen Streams. Still, small expeditions were sent out in three directions—north-east, north, and north-west. On the 11th Boshof was occupied, in accordance with instructions from Lord Roberts, who from the first had determined to guard the left of his own advance by a flank movement through Boshof and Hoopstad, half-way between the two railway lines. On the 16th Methuen also sent a few troops and a battery up the line to Warrenton to hold the south bank of the Vaal and prevent Du Toit on the other side of the river at Fourteen Streams from interfering with the repair of the railway line to that place. Here the contest chiefly resolved itself into artillery duels across the river. But Methuen's most ambitious scheme was an attempt to clear the colony, and make his line of railway secure from attack on the western flank by hemming in the rebels north-west of Kimberley. With this object he left Kimberley on March 23 with 800 mounted men, two batteries, and a battalion and a half, the idea being to divide his men and force the Vaal at Schmidt's Drift due west of Kimberley, and at another drift further north, so as to cut off a party of 500 rebels said to be west of the river. As the march progressed the difficulties seemed to increase, there was some trouble about securing Schmidt's Drift, and the Boers and rebels proved to be both more numerous and further off than had been anticipated. Although Lord Roberts, in the first instance, had ordered Methuen to clear the district round Kimberley, he soon became anxious lest this expedition should lead Methuen too far afield and might involve him in disaster. On March 28, therefore, he recalled the expedition, and ordered the con-

March 16. Warrenton occupied.

March 23–28. Abortive expedition to north-west of Kimberley.

centration of Lord Methuen's forces at Boshof. He allowed Lord Methuen to threaten punishment on any renewal of disturbance, but this probably had no great effect, as the rebel forces were for a long time left unpunished.

April 4. Concentration at Boshof.

The concentration at Boshof was effected on April 4, and on the following day a very satisfactory victory was gained by the mounted troops of the force.

De Villebois Mareuil's expedition to Boshof.

It will be remembered that at the Boer council of war held at Kroonstad in March * it had been decided to give more recognition to the foreign volunteers who had come out to assist the Boers, and who had hitherto been treated with scant consideration. They had been scattered about in various foreign corps or mixed up among the commandos, and the Boer leaders had been at little pains to conceal how very low they rated their services. The best known among these foreign volunteers was a certain Comte De Villebois Mareuil, who was at one time in command of the *Légion Etrangère*, and after a distinguished career in the French army, had retired, and subsequently had made some mark as a writer on military subjects. Naturally of a quixotic nature, he showed in his life and his writings an almost mediæval delight in the glory of a soldier's profession. When he came out to the Transvaal he acted even more as a free-lance than the other foreigners. He went about from camp to camp criticising with a good deal of vigour and with no success the dilatory tactics alike of Joubert before Ladysmith, and of Cronje before Kimberley. The failure of these two generals no doubt opened the eyes of the Boers to the possibility that there might be something in his ideas; so, largely owing to the influence of Louis Botha and of Steyn, he was given the rank of *Vecht-Generaal* and the task of organising all the Europeans into one foreign legion. But instead of setting to work to do this at a time when the respite from hostilities gave him an unique opportunity, he seems to have done nothing more than collect round him a small staff. He then on March 24 went off with a few men on a mysterious expedition towards Boshof. With his party, consisting of one hundred foreigners, chiefly Frenchmen, and twenty-five Boers,

* See chap. ii., p. 27.

and supplied with a quantity of dynamite, he intended to make a raid on the railway, blow up the bridge over the Modder, and cut Methuen's communications. Early in April he had reports about the defenceless state of Boshof, dating no doubt from the end of March, when there were as a fact only 400 men and two guns in it, and, on the strength of that report, he was joined by a commando of 200 Boers. If he had been quicker about his march,* the elaborate surprise which he prepared might very well have been successful.† As it was, he only arrived at the farm Tweefontein, five miles to the south-east of Boshof, on the morning of the 5th, the very day after Lord Methuen had concentrated there six and a half battalions, twenty-two guns, and 1,000 mounted men.

April 5. Methuen defeats him at Tweefontein.

On the morning of the 5th news was brought to Lord Methuen that a commando had off-saddled five miles off. He immediately collected a force of 750 mounted men,‡ together with the 4th Battery, and went out with the object of surrounding them. In this he was entirely successful. De Villebois Mareuil, on seeing English troops approaching, rapidly disposed his force on two kopjes, the Boers on one and the foreigners under his own command on the other. The task of Lord Methuen's force was not a hard one, as he had sufficient mounted men to make enveloping movements on each side of De Villebois Mareuil's force, while the cover for approaching the position was good; but the special interest in the fight, from the English point of view, was that the new yeomanry were in action here for the first

* He took from March 24 to April 4 to cover the eighty miles from Brandfort to Tweefontein, while a party under Von Wrangel, who started on April 9 to find out what had become of him, arrived at the same place on the 13th. No doubt De Villebois Mareuil's guides were bad, though there is no reason to suspect treason, as was done by some of the foreigners at the time.

† A careful and most systematic order giving the dispositions of his small force for the surprise of Boshof was discovered among his papers after his death; this plan was considered so exhaustive by Lord Methuen that when he subsequently left Colonel Courtenay in charge of Boshof he simply handed him this plan and instructed him to make his dispositions so as to meet any attack of a nature contemplated therein.

‡ Five hundred Imperial Yeomanry under Lord Chesham, 250 Kimberley Mounted Corps under Major A. J. King.

time, and that they did their work well. The Boers very soon saw the hopeless nature of the fight, and made their escape while there was yet time; but those under De Villebois Mareuil's immediate command on the more easterly kopje, inspired by their leader's indomitable courage, held out for four hours, and only put up the white flag when the English had fixed bayonets and were within thirty yards of the position. By this time the general had been mortally struck by a shell, ten had been killed, and eleven wounded; the remaining fifty-one were made prisoners.* The French general deserved a better fate, though he could not have wished for a nobler death, fighting to the end for a cause which he believed to be that of the weak oppressed by the strong; and Lord Methuen chivalrously expressed the feelings of his countrymen in the honours rendered to the brave Frenchman after his death. By his orders the Loyal North Lancashire regiment gave full military honours at his burial in Boshof cemetery, and he subsequently put up a stone to mark his grave.

Plan of campaign for three columns on the west.

By the beginning of April the problems to be dealt with on the western flank had become clearer, and Lord Roberts was maturing his plans for dealing with them. His needs on this side were to have a column moving up through Boshof and Hoopstad to support his own advance, another to relieve Mafeking, secure the railway up to it and make a flank march on Pretoria, and a third to clear the rebels from Griqualand West and Bechuanaland. The first object was to be attained, as he had arranged from the first, by Methuen's Division, for the second he had originally intended Rundle's Eighth Division, but finding that Rundle was more needed in the Eastern Free State, on April 4 he ordered Hunter's Division and the Imperial Light Horse over from Natal. To deal with the rising in Griqualand West and Bechuanaland, General Warren † was also brought from Natal, and appointed governor of that region. However, on this side, as in the centre and on the eastern side, a longer delay occurred than had been anticipated, due partly to the

* The British casualties were three killed and ten wounded.

† For an account of General Warren's expedition see below, pp. 226–236.

measures necessary to counteract de Wet's vigorous adventures. Methuen himself had been ordered early in April to advance towards Hoopstad, but on reaching Zwartkoppiesfontein, about ten miles from Boshof, on April 8, he was told not to advance further, as Hunter would not be ready to support him for at least a fortnight. Even when Hunter's force did reach Cape Colony, part of Hart's Brigade had to be diverted to the relief of Wepener,* and it was not till the end of the month that the rest of his division had reached Kimberley. While Methuen was at Zwartkoppiesfontein he sent out two expeditions under Mahon † and Douglas to scour the surrounding country, the latter of whom had a skirmish with a few Boers at Granaat Plaats, and on the 20th the whole force was ordered by Lord Roberts to retire on Boshof. During the retirement the column was much harassed by General Andries Cronje, who had come down from Christiana with part of his force, and who succeeded in inflicting a loss of twenty-three on the English, though at a cost of thirty casualties among his own men. All this time Paget had been in command of his brigade at Warrenton, and with a 6-inch gun and some howitzers was almost daily engaged in artillery duels with the Boers on the opposite bank.

Relief of Mafeking becomes urgent.

Meanwhile the relief of Mafeking was always on Lord Roberts's mind. He had been obliged to give up the project, formed early in March, of assigning this task to Methuen, owing to the impossibility of raising enough mounted troops in Kimberley. His next idea was that the relief would be automatically effected by a combined advance by Rundle or Hunter over the river to Fourteen Streams and by Methuen on Hoopstad. But as these movements were delayed, the relief was now becoming a matter of pressing necessity. In March Baden-Powell had written that he could hold out till May 22, and early in April Lord Roberts had sent his brother, Major Baden-Powell, over to Kimberley to make inquiries as to the possibility of equipping a flying column

* See chap. ii., p. 65.

† Colonel Mahon had been sent by Lord Roberts on April 2 to take command of Lord Methuen's mounted troops.

to march north with the sole object of effecting the relief. The inquiries proved satisfactory, and when Hunter arrived at Kimberley on April 21, his first duty, by Lord Roberts's instructions, was to start a relief column under Colonel Mahon, to whom Lord Roberts had personally given careful directions about the march. The preparations were carried out rapidly and with as much secrecy as is possible in that country of rumours, and by the morning of May 4 the column was ready to start from Barkly West. It consisted of the Imperial Light Horse from Natal, the Kimberley Mounted Corps, two sections of "M" Battery, "F" Section of pom-poms, and 100 picked infantry contributed in equal proportions by each battalion of Barton's Fusilier Brigade, representing England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland.* It was essentially a flying column, the only defect in its organization being that it had no Royal Engineers, which is an unaccountable omission, as it was known that the supply of water might be a difficulty. Indeed, the force would have been saved some unnecessary hardship, if there had been a few men with the apparatus for making the most of the water in the shallow wells.

May 4. Flying column under Mahon formed.

Difficulties of the expedition.

The adventure was not without considerable risk for so small a force, for besides the Boers round Mafeking, there were the 2,000 Boers round Christiana and Fourteen Streams, while Liebenberg on the Colony side of the railway had been reinforced by Du Preez with part of the Krugersdorp commando from Natal. Since the great object was rapidity, it was most important that Mahon's column should avoid being delayed by fighting, so instead of taking the direct route by the railway, it started rather more to the west, where it was not so likely to be expected. At the same time the forward movement up-country was begun by Hunter and Methuen, partly as an integral portion of Lord Roberts's advance, partly to divert attention from the special expedition for the relief of Mafeking. Simultaneously Sir Charles Warren arrived at Orange River to prepare for his expedition against the

The work assigned to Hunter, Methuen, and Warren.

* Total 900 mounted men, 100 infantry, four guns, and two pom-poms, besides 55 mule-wagons conveying sixteen days' provisions and twelve days' forage for the force and some medical stores for the garrison.

western rebels. The defence of the railway line from the Orange River northwards had already been entrusted to Sir Charles Parsons with some Militia regiments.

May 3. Methuen demonstrates north of Boshof.

On May 3 Methuen made a demonstration with some yeomanry and infantry of Douglas's brigade ten miles north of Boshof in order to distract attention from Hunter's intended movement further west. But finding that the 400 Boers reported to have been in the neighbourhood had already retired on Fourteen Streams, he returned to Boshof on May 5. In the centre Methuen's second brigade, under Paget, went on bombarding the Fourteen Streams position from Warrenton.

May 4. Hunter starts for Rooidam.

On May 4 Hunter crossed the Vaal at Windsorton, with the intention of driving away Liebenberg's and Du Preez's forces, which had taken up a position at Rooidam, about eleven miles south-west of Warrenton on the right bank of the river. At 7 A.M. on May 5 Hunter's force, which consisted of the 6th Fusilier Brigade, under Major-General Barton, a section of "M" Battery, the 28th and 78th Field Batteries, the 24th Company R.E., and three companies Imperial Yeomanry lent to him by Methuen, arrived in front of these Boers, and, after firing some desultory shots, began the attack at noon.

May 5. Hunter drives the Boers from their position at Rooidam.

The Boers were occupying a series of kopjes and low connecting ridges running north-west to south-east, about two and a half miles in extent, their left resting on the road to Fourteen Streams; in front they had some 500 yards of clear ground, but the approaches were covered by thick bush and scrub, affording good cover to scattered formations. Barton on the left flank was directed to work through this scrub with the Welsh and Royal Fusiliers, but not to cross the open ground until he had given the artillery, in action at 2,800 yards' range, sufficient time to shell the Boer lines. The remainder of the infantry threatened the position from the south and south-west. Meanwhile the Yeomanry and two guns of "M" Battery were sent to turn the Boer right flank, and a very pretty piece of work ensued. The Northumberland Hussars, beautifully mounted, swept round the left flank of Barton's attack, driving back some Boer outposts. The two R.H.A. guns were then brought up, and

opened fire on the enemy's right. The Yorkshire Dragoons, at a gallop, seized a kraal, from which a short advance enabled them to occupy a kopje enfilading the Boer main position. Soon after 1 P.M. Barton ordered the assault; the Boers opened a heavy fire on the British troops, but the extension being wide and the cover good, the infantry, advancing at a great pace, captured the heights with small loss to themselves. The Boers retreated about 4 P.M. towards Fourteen Streams, pursued for some miles by the Imperial Yeomanry.*

May 7. He occupies Fourteen Streams.

On the following morning, May 6, Hunter moved east along the northern bank of the Vaal and enfiladed the Boer position at Fourteen Streams, whilst Paget on the opposite bank engaged them in front. The Boer position was thus made untenable, and on May 7th Hunter occupied Fourteen Streams without opposition.

Useful effect of these operations.

The effect of the operations at Rooidam and Fourteen Streams was immediate. Liebenberg and Du Preez were driven up north, Du Toit, after vacating the Fourteen Streams position, retired north-east on Wolmaransstad, and Hunter was able to dispense with Paget and send him back to join his division at Boshof. Above all, it cleared the way for Mahon, who was able to hurry on unopposed for some time, although Louis Botha, who had heard of his movements on May 6, sent off De la Rey from the Zand River to take command of the operations against him.

May 4–17. Mahon's march to Mafeking.

Mahon's march was very ably managed, for though the Boers knew that he had started he managed to escape their attention from the 4th to the 13th of May, partly by the skill with which he chose his route, partly also owing to the good marching of his infantry. It appears that the Boers, misled by his hundred Fusiliers, thought that the column was tied down to the pace of an infantry column, and that it could be caught up at any moment, whereas the pace was consistently kept up at that of a mounted column. By May 9 the column had covered the 129 miles from Barkly West to Vryburg without incidents, except occasional dearth of water at the end of long and tiring marches. Vryburg

* The Boer casualties were over 50, including Commandant Van Aswegen; English, 7 killed and 38 wounded.

gave the column a hearty welcome, for it had been occupied by the Boers and cut off from all communication with the outside world for six months. On May 11 information was brought to Mahon about the state of Colonel Plumer's and Colonel Baden-Powell's forces. Lieutenant Moorsom, one of Baden-Powell's officers, had made his escape through the Boer lines from Mafeking, reported Baden-Powell's views to Plumer, and then ridden down to report to Mahon and arrange his meeting with Plumer.* It was not till the 13th that any Boers, except surrendering rebels, were encountered. Liebenberg, with a force of 600 men, chiefly Griqualand rebels, one Armstrong, and a pom-pom, had been vainly trying to catch the column and cut it off since the battle of Rooidam; he only succeeded on that day in placing himself in front of it. From Setlagoli, whence Mahon started on the 13th, the direct road to Mafeking turns off in an easterly direction, and at Koedoesrand passes through a nek guarded on each side by kopjes. In this favourable position Liebenberg had intrenched himself in the full expectation of taking Mahon at a disadvantage. Mahon, seeing that the Boers in the Koedoesrand defile might delay him indefinitely even if they did not defeat him, with great readiness left the main road and pushed on due north through the thick bush country beyond, ignoring Liebenberg altogether. But when it was thought that the Boers had been given the slip, they suddenly appeared on the right of the column and, profiting by a moment when the convoy was straggling, delivered their attack. The country was a difficult one for Mahon to fight in, as the bush gave an easy approach to the Boers; but he immediately brought his guns into action, parked his convoy, reinforced his right flank, and, after a fairly warm engagement of about three-quarters of an hour, drove off the Boers, his losses amounting to five killed and twenty-one wounded. However, his men could go no further this night,

May 13. Engagement at Koedoesrand.

* At Baden-Powell's request Mahon sent him an account of the numbers of his force, his guns, and the state of his supplies in the following enigmatical form, as he had no cypher:—"Our numbers are the Naval and Military Club multiplied by ten [94 (Piccadilly) × 10 = 940]; our guns, the number of sons in the Ward family [6]; our supplies, the O.C. 9th Lancers [Little]."

so, although there was no water, he had to bivouac where he stood. To make matters worse, the Maretsani River, which they reached next morning, was found to be nearly dry. The animals could only be insufficiently watered from holes dug in the river bed, and it was another twenty-three mile march before more water could be obtained. Fortunately, no opposition was encountered, and eventually on May 15 the column reached Jan Massibi on the Molopo River, eighteen miles to the west of Mafeking, where it met Colonel Plumer's force, which had also just arrived from Sefetili.* Here they were cheered by the news of the unsuccessful attack on Mafeking made by Eloff three days earlier.† Mahon, being senior, assumed command of his own and Plumer's forces and divided them into two brigades under Colonels Plumer‡ and Edwards. Starting off in the early morning of the 16th, he halted for the mid-day rest a couple of miles short of Israel's Farm and just beyond a point whence Mafeking could be seen for the first time for several months by a British relieving force.

May 15. Plumer and Mahon meet at Jan Massibi.

May 16. They encounter De la Rey at Israel's Farm.

After the engagement near Koedoesrand, Liebenberg had hurried up north, where he was joined by 200 men and a Krupp gun under Commandant Steenekamp from Mafeking, and subsequently De la Rey had come up with more men from the investing commandos, and assumed command of the joint Boer forces, which numbered about 2,000 men with five guns and two pom-poms. De la Rey posted his force astride the Molopo, about eight miles west of Mafeking, with his centre at Israel's Farm and his left on a ridge trending westwards on the south side of the river. As Mahon's troops were resting, a detachment of the B.S.A. Police,

De la Rey driven back.

* See p. 208.

† For an account of the siege of Mafeking, see chap. xvii.

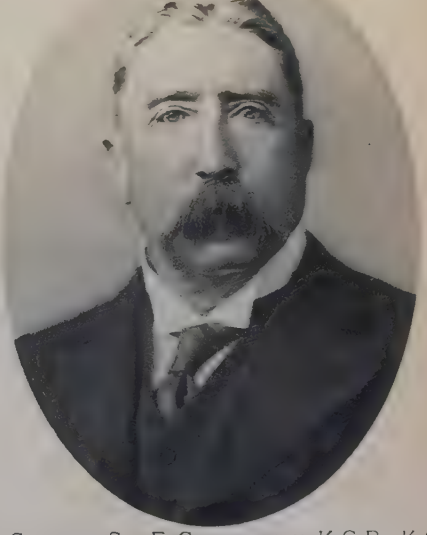
‡ Lieutenant-Colonel Plumer's column was about 700 strong, and included the following units:—

3 squadrons British South Africa Police.
Detachment Queensland Mounted Infantry.
5 squadrons Rhodesian Regiment.
1 troop South Rhodesian Volunteers.
4 guns (12-pounder B.L.) Canadian Artillery.
3 guns (7-pounder M.L.).
1 gun (12½-pounder B.L.) Vickers-Maxim.

MAJOR-GENERAL J. B. B. DICKSON, C.B.,
COMMANDING 4TH CAVALRY BRIGADE.
Photo by Bassano.

BRIGADIER-GENERAL B. T. MAHON, D.S.O.
COMMANDER OF MAFEKING RELIEF COLUMN.
Photo by Elliott & Fry.

LIEUT-COLONEL E. H. DALGETY.
COMMANDER OF THE WEPENER DEFENCE FORCE.
Photo by Salmon.



LIEUT GENERAL SIR F. CARRINGTON, K.C.B., K.C.
COMMANDING RHODESIAN FIELD FORCE.
Photo by Bassano.

who had been scouting south of the river, galloped back reporting that they had been fired on by the Boers on the ridge. An advance was immediately ordered, both brigades being kept north of the river. Plumer's was on the right and Edwards's on the left, the convoy was in the centre, and part of the Kimberley Mounted Corps, under Colonel Peakman, acted as reserve in the rear. Colonel Edwards gradually worked round the Boer right through bush country, which led up to the slopes where they were posted, and succeeded in getting behind them, but some difficulty was experienced by Plumer, as the Boers clung obstinately to their position at Israel's Farm, enfilading his force and the convoy from the projecting ridge on their left, and at one time pressing hard upon Peakman's rearguard. However, here too the Boers had to give way, after about five hours' fighting, when Plumer had been reinforced by two of the Horse Artillery guns. A general advance completed the rout of De la Rey's force.*

May 17. Mafeking relieved.

Though the Boers had been cleared away from this strong position, Colonel Mahon could not be certain that they had not taken up another in front of Mafeking, so he ordered the exhausted troops to bivouac on the ground gained; but later on in the night hearing from Major Karri Davies of the Imperial Light Horse, who had ridden through into Mafeking, that the coast was clear, he inspanned again and entered the town at 3.30 A.M. on the 17th. The Boers did not wait for the somewhat half-hearted pursuit which Colonel Baden-Powell started some hours later, but rapidly fled from their laager, leaving a small gun, some ammunition, some useless stores, and their papers as a trophy to the victors.

Credit due for the relief to Plumer, Hunter, and Mahon.

The relief of Mafeking, so long hoped for by the British people at home, who had been more stirred by the gallant defence of Baden-Powell and his handful of men than by any other episode in the war, was thus at last accomplished with very little loss to the expeditionary column. But it must be remembered that, although the ostensible cause of the relief was the despatch of Mahon's column, no small share of the

* Casualties.—English: killed, 7; wounded, 24. Boers: killed, 2; wounded, 8 (according to one of their accounts).

credit must be given to Colonel Plumer's force, whose patient fighting during so many months had largely contributed to the happy result. General Hunter also, by his timely action at Rooidam, and his careful arrangements for the expedition, rendered Mahon's success primarily possible. Mahon himself, ably seconded by an excellent staff, of whom Colonel Frank Rhodes, his intelligence officer, and Major Bell Smyth were the most prominent members, showed great skill in avoiding such serious encounters with the Boers as would have wrecked the undertaking. It is sufficient testimony to the enthusiasm which animated him and the column under his command, that in a difficult and poorly watered country they marched a daily average of eighteen miles for a fortnight, besides taking part in two engagements.*

Expedition well advised.

As events turned out the expedition was hardly necessary. The garrison could certainly have held out till June 1, when Hunter's whole division could have been at Mafeking.† Nevertheless Lord Roberts was quite right to send it when

* Table Showing Details of March of Colonel Mahon's Column.

Date 1900.	From	To	Distance Miles.	Times of marching, including short halts.
May 4	Barkly West	Greefputs	9	8.30 a.m. —11.30 a.m.
„ 5	Greefputs	Spitzkop	19	2 a.m. — 9 a.m.
	Spitzkop	Gunnings	16	2 p.m. — 7 p.m.
„ 6	Gunnings	Espach Drift	8	5 a.m. —10.30 a.m.
	Espach Drift	Greefdale	11	1.30 p.m. — 6.30 p.m.
„ 7	Greefdale	7m. W. of Taungs ...	20	6.30 a.m. —10.30 a.m. 2 p.m. — 5 p.m.
„ 8	7m. W. of Taungs ...	Jacobs Val	26	3.45 a.m. —12 noon 4.30 p.m. — 8 p.m.
„ 9	Jacobs Val	Vryburg	21	6 a.m. — 9 a.m. 12.30 p.m. — 5.30 p.m.
„ 10	Vryburg		14	6 p.m. —12 midnight
„ 11		Monjana Madedi ...	5	6 a.m. — 8 a.m.
	Monjana Madedi ...		11	5.30 p.m. —10 p.m.
„ 12		Jackalspan	7	6.30 a.m. — 9.30 a.m.
	Jackalspan	Setlagoli	13	4 p.m. — 9.30 p.m.
„ 13	Setlagoli		15	6.30 a.m. —10 a.m. 2 p.m. — 4.30 p.m.
„ 14		Maretsani R.	5	6.30 a.m. —10.30 a.m.
	Maretsani R.		16	3.30 p.m. — 9 p.m.
„ 15		Jan Massibi	10	2.30 a.m. — 7.30 a.m.
„ 16	Jan Massibi		16	6.30 a.m. —12.30 p.m. 2 p.m. — 5.30 p.m.
„ 17	Israel's Farm	Mafeking	9	12.5 a.m. — 4 a.m.
		Total	251	

† He reached Lichtenburg on that day, and could just as well have been at Mafeking if it had been necessary.

he did. He was under the impression that the garrison could not hold out later than May 22nd; its surrender or capture would have had an effect both on English and Boers quite disproportioned to its military value; and the strength of the Boers on the western border by no means indicated that Hunter's advance would be as rapid as it actually was.

May 17. Methuen at Hoopstad.

On the same day that Mafeking was relieved, Lord Methuen, who had left garrisons in Boshof and Frankfort half way to Kimberley, occupied Hoopstad. From Hoopstad Lord Roberts had originally intended that he should march through Reitzburg and Parys, and be across the Vaal at the same time as he himself reached Vereeniging. Methuen* accordingly marched along the southern bank of the Vaal until he reached Bothaville on May 24th, the Boers still surrendering in great numbers to him.† But by this time Lord Roberts had determined to call over Ian Hamilton west of the line, so he brought Methuen's division over to Kroonstad to guard his rear and prevent raids on the railway. After his arrival at Kroonstad on May 28th Methuen disappears from the western side for seven weeks.

May 28. Methuen at Kroonstad.

May 7–14. Hunter repairs bridge at Fourteen Streams.

After driving the Boers from Fourteen Streams, Hunter first employed his men at repairing the railway.‡ The iron railway bridge over the Vaal, 1,330 ft. in length, had been destroyed by the Boers and would not be fit for use for several months, but a week at Fourteen Streams enabled the troops to turn the old road bridge into a fairly substantial railway bridge. This task completed, Hunter left Fourteen Streams on May 15th and entered the Transvaal.§ The next

* Methuen had now been rejoined by Paget's brigade and the I.Y. he had lent to Hunter for the action of Rooidam.

† By May 26, 450 Boers had come in, and 500 rifles, and 250 horses had been surrendered, and de Wet mentions that about this time the Bothaville commando had absolutely melted away.

‡ Hunter was reinforced by the 6th battalion Imperial Yeomanry under Colonel Burn, and by Hart and the Border Regiment at Fourteen Streams; but the 5th Brigade still remained short of the Somerset Light Infantry, which did not rejoin from Smithfield till May 29.

§ It is worthy of note that the 2nd battalion Royal Scots, the last of the British troops to leave the Transvaal in 1881, were also, except for Plumer's brief incursion, the first to enter it in the present war, an advance party of that regiment being the first to cross the boundary on May 18, 1900.

May 16. Captures Christiana.

May 23. Reaches Vryburg.

day he occupied Christiana without opposition, this being the first Transvaal town to fall into British hands, and then recrossing the boundary, arrived with his division at Vryburg on May 23rd to superintend the repair of the railway to Mafeking.

Boers in the west abandon organized resistance.

Methuen's and Hunter's operations and the relief of Mafeking, combined with Lord Roberts's own rapid advance, had, for the time being, put an end to any attempt at organized resistance by the western Boers. Du Toit, after first retreating on Wolmaransstad, had retired to the Rustenburg district; from Christiana Andries Cronje had sent his men on to Krugersdorp, remaining behind ill at Klerksdorp himself, and Snyman had withdrawn temporarily into the kloofs of the Marico district;* De la Rey with Steenekamp had hurried off to co-operate with Botha, and was in time to assist at the fight at Doornkop. In fact, the only people who gave trouble to the English at this time were armed bands of Kaffirs, who, elated at the departure of their former masters, and in some cases sore at the treatment they had received, were now roving about the country, looting and terrorizing the farms. A few stern examples, however, soon brought these to order.

May 26. Hunter advances towards Lichtenburg.

On May 26th, after the railway line had been repaired north and south of Mafeking,† Hunter marched off from Vryburg to Lichtenburg. Owing to scarcity of water each battalion had to be sent independently half a day's march ahead of the one behind it. This difficult march was nevertheless accomplished without a hitch, so good were Hunter's dispositions and the organisation of his transport. Hunter remained a week at Lichtenburg, where he was rejoined by Mahon with the Imperial Light Horse and the Kimberley Mounted Corps. On June 7th he entered Ventersdorp.

June 11. Potchefstroom captured.

Potchefstroom‡ surrendered to Mahon on the 11th, and

* He afterwards joined Botha's force, see chap. viii., p. 279.

† Owing to Plumer's vigilance there was little damage left to make good on the northern line, and the first train from Buluwayo came into Mafeking on May 24.

‡ Potchefstroom was the original capital of the Transvaal, and the law passed by the South African Republic, stating that Potchefstroom is the capital and Pretoria the seat of government, was only recently

Andries Cronje gave himself up to a party of the Kimberley Mounted Corps under Captain Lambard who rode into Klerksdorp on June 14th.

Baden-Powell and Plumer were also available for aggressive action after the relief of Mafeking. On May 26th the former occupied Zeerust, and both then started east in a line parallel to Hunter further south. After a slight skirmish at Eland's River on June 7, they reached Rustenburg on June 14. Hunter left behind small garrisons at Vryburg, Schweizer Reneke, Ventersdorp, and Klerksdorp. Baden-Powell had posts, for they could be called nothing more, at Mafeking, Ottoshoop, Lobatsi, and at Zeerust, where Lord Edward Cecil was left to administer the district, a task which he performed to the satisfaction of Boers and British alike.

Baden Powell and Plumer also advance to Rustenburg by June 14th.

A few days after the occupation of Klerksdorp, Hunter's division was broken up and ceased to exist as a unit. Though short-lived it had performed excellent work. Hunter, it is true, had met with no serious opposition after his fight at Rooidam, but his skilful movements had frightened the Boers

Hunter's division broken up. Its useful work.

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repealed. When the Royal Scots Fusiliers entered Potchefstroom on June 14, they hoisted their Union Jack, which has a curious history. It was the flag which was hauled down in Pretoria on the retrocession of the Transvaal in 1881. It was then buried by a few loyalists in a coffin on which was the following inscription:—

IN MEMORY OF

THE BRITISH FLAG

IN THE TRANSVAAL;

WHICH DEPARTED THIS LIFE AUGUST 2ND, 1881.

AGED 4 YEARS.

IN OTHER LANDS NONE KNEW THEE BUT TO LOVE THEE.

RESURGAM.

Colonel Gildea, however, who was Commandant of Pretoria at the time, dug it up again and brought it back to England, where it was left in charge of his regiment, the Royal Scots Fusiliers.

Another circumstance worth recording about the occupation of Potchefstroom is that an old ship's gun, which had been used by the Boers who besieged the garrison of Potchefstroom in 1881, was found there. It was afterwards presented to the Royal Scots Fusiliers, in whose depôt at Ayr, N.B., it now is.

and contributed materially to the success of Mahon's expedition. Lord Roberts's own advance was, no doubt, as in the case of Natal, the chief influence in drawing the Boers away from the west to the centre; but Hunter certainly made the most of his chances. The marching of his men, especially of Barton's Fusilier brigade, in a country often waterless, was remarkable. In one march of two days the Fusiliers covered forty-five miles, and during the whole time hardly a dozen men fell out from exhaustion.* Altogether between May 3rd and June 11th, when the mounted troops reached Potchefstroom, the division marched 360 miles. By that time, Hunter had come so close to Lord Roberts that he was immediately available for work in districts which at the time appeared to be more disturbed than the Western Transvaal.

III

The rebellion north of the Orange River.

Although Kitchener and Settle had stamped out the rebellion south of the Orange River before Roberts left Bloemfontein, there were still some matters calling for attention in the districts of Cape Colony north of that

* Marches of Hunter's Division (Tenth). The marches taken are those of Barton's Fusilier brigade; the dates therefore do not in all cases agree with those given in the text for Hunter's own movements.

		Miles.
May	2. At Windsorton Road Station.	
,,	3. To Windsorton Drift	8
,,	4. To Mooilaagte	6
,,	5. To Rooidam	5
,,	6. To Weltevrede	12
,,	7. To Fourteen Streams	6
,,	8–14. Halt.	
,,	15–16. To Christiana	25
,,	17–19. To Phokwane	32
,,	20–21. To Taungs	24
,,	22–23. To Vryburg	45
,,	24–25. Halt.	
,, to June	26. 3. The division marches in seven separate detachments *vid* Geysdorp and Barber's Pan to Lichtenburg	116
,,	4–8. Halt.	
,,	9–12. (Midday). To Ventersdorp	44
,,	12–14. To Potchefstroom	40
		363

river, and west of the sphere of Hunter's operations. Several of the Prieska rebels had crossed the Orange River into the neighbouring district of Gordonia after Settle's occupation of Draghoender and Upington, and remained watching the drifts for an opportunity of returning south past the cordon of British posts established at Upington, Draghoender, and Prieska.* Most of their chief men had been captured or had given up the struggle, and a Jewish storekeeper, Hermann Judelewitz, now acted as their leader. Some of their Transvaal and Free State allies had retired further north to take part in the more promising rebellion which was still unsubdued in Griqualand West and British Bechuanaland†; others had retired to their own country. As long as the rebellion north of the Orange River was not as effectually crushed as that in the south, there was no security for the railway line to Mafeking, nor could even the pacified districts of Cape Colony be considered reasonably safe.

Fugitive rebels from Prieska.

For more than a month after Settle's departure from the Prieska district the fugitives in Gordonia gave no trouble, but towards the end of May a report was brought to Colonel Adye, in command at Prieska, that about 400 of them had formed a laager at Kheis on the northern bank of the river, halfway between Prieska and Upington. Adye by this time had been reinforced by the Gloucester Company of Mounted Infantry, while the Militia Battalion of the Welsh regiment had taken the place of the Suffolks. Leaving his infantry and two guns of the 44th Battery at Prieska, he made a forced march with the remaining four guns, his detachment of Nesbitt's Horse, and the Mounted Infantry to the drift opposite Kheis, which he reached on May 26th. On his march he had picked up the Lancashire Hussars I.Y. at Draghoender, and he was joined at Kheis by the Warwickshire Yeomanry from Kenhardt. Besides their laager on the northern bank, the rebels were found in possession of a wooded island in the middle of the river and commanding

Finally disposed of by Adye at Kheis on 28th May.

* See chap. i., pp. 2–6.

† See vol. iii., pp. 112 *sqq.*, for the siege of Kuruman and Pilcher's expedition.

the drift. This and the woods on both banks concealed the laager from Adye. On the 27th, some shots were exchanged between the English and the rebels, and on the 28th Adye arranged for the surprise of the laager. Posting the guns and the Warwick Yeomanry at the drift to make a demonstration in front, he took the rest of his force across another drift five miles higher up stream, and then worked down towards the laager. The surprise was complete. The combined effect of the gun-fire and of Adye's flank march drove the rebels out of the laager after several of them, including Judelewitz, had been shot down. Unfortunately, the Lancashire Yeomanry, who had been sent to cut off their retreat, were stopped by the shells of the 44th Battery, which continued firing too long, for want of adequate signalling arrangements on the northern bank. Meanwhile the Warwick Yeomanry had suffered some loss in attempting to capture the island in midstream, having three killed, including Major Orr Ewing, the company commander, and six wounded. At the end of the day, however, Adye had captured the laager with all the women and children, besides many prisoners and thousands of head of cattle. His own loss out of a force of about 350 was nine killed and eighteen wounded.

By this brilliantly conducted little exploit Adye more than retrieved his repulse at Houwater, and finally put an end to all danger of the fugitive rebels returning to the Prieska district, for not only was Judelewitz's party driven away, but another small party which had intended to co-operate with him by crossing at Koegas Pont also fled north to Griquatown.

Rebels in Griqualand West and British Bechuanaland.

The rebellion in Griqualand West and British Bechuanaland was a more serious affair. The population of these districts was of a different class to that of the rebels south of the Orange; these were mostly colonists from the Victoria district who had never left Cape Colony, but the farmers of Griqualand and Bechuanaland were chiefly descended from the hardy trekkers into the Orange Free State or the Transvaal, and were among the best fighters in South Africa. Their enthusiasm for fighting was so great that, not content with the easy course of rebellion which, except for Pilcher's

surprise of Douglas in January, had hitherto left them practically undisturbed in their own country, some of them had joined the Free State forces under de Wet. The rebels who remained behind were in complete possession of all the towns in their district, and felt fairly secure in the Kaap Mountains, which stretch from Taungs down to the junction of the Vaal and Orange Rivers near Douglas, and in the bush country which merges into the Kalahari Desert to the north. Liebenberg and his Transvaalers, who had been in the district when Lord Methuen had made his expedition to Barkly West,* and had fought with Hunter at Rooidam, subsequently retired to bar Mahon's advance. The rebel leaders left were Generals P. de Villiers, Ventner, and Forster. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of rebels in arms, for, as usual with all the Boers, and especially with the Cape rebels, arms were taken up and laid down to suit the exigencies of the moment; but the average number in arms during April and May may be put down as between one and two thousand.

At end of April expedition under Sir Charles Warren organized.

More than a month passed after the hasty recall of Lord Methuen from Barkly West before these rebels were again troubled. Sir Alfred Milner, however, laid great stress on freeing the Colony of all remnants of the rebellion, and Lord Roberts himself saw that as Hunter advanced it would be wise to remove this standing menace to his communications. Towards the end of April, therefore, Lord Roberts sanctioned the formation of a small column under Sir Charles Warren to proceed to Griqualand West and British Bechuanaland. Warren, who was brought over from Natal, seemed especially suitable for this task, as he had been employed in several previous expeditions in Griqualand West and Bechuanaland, and had been Special Commissioner of the district. He knew the country well, had learned to understand and appreciate its inhabitants, and had relations with the loyalist remnants which enabled him to obtain good information.

Warren's plan and force.

He arrived at the Orange River on May 4, and immediately began preparations for his task. His plan was first to clear the country between the Orange River and the Vaal

* *Supra*, p. 211.

and capture Douglas; then, after driving the rebels out of Campbell and the Kaap mountains, to advance on Griquatown and Kuruman. He would thus force them either to surrender or fall into the arms of the troops on the Mafeking border. For the first portion of this programme he required a base at Belmont, and for the second one at Kimberley, whence there is a good road to Schmidt's Drift on the Vaal. The railway line was specially excluded from his jurisdiction, but he seems to have experienced no difficulty in obtaining supplies on this account. The force he was given to command was gradually brought up to over 2,000 men during the month of May. *

May 21. Warren captures Douglas.

On May 20, before all his troops had been concentrated, he started with about 600 men towards Douglas, a village lying south of the Vaal where the Belmont road branches off to Griquatown. During the night he gained the hills above the village, which were only occupied by the Boers during the daytime, and entered Douglas with scarcely any resistance on May 21. Three days were spent in restoring the civil administration and in carrying on some inconclusive skirmishes with parties of rebels left on the northern outskirts of the town. Warren was then ready to move further north to carry out the second part of his programme.

Rebels decide to make a stand in front of Campbell.

Twenty miles from Douglas, Campbell lies at the edge of the Kaap plateau behind a difficult ridge which extends for about ten miles between Linksfontein and Knoffelfontein.

* Warren's column was constituted as follows:

4 guns "E" battery Royal Canadian Artillery.
2 guns Royal Cape Artillery.
23rd and 24th Companies VIIIth Battalion (Duke of Lancaster's Own, and Cumberland and Westmoreland) I.Y. under Colonel Crawley . . . . . } Lord Erroll.
4 companies Paget's Horse . . . . . }
1 company Munster Fusiliers M.I.
30 Cape Mounted Police.
30 Warren's Scouts.
7 companies Duke of Edinburgh's Own Volunteer Rifles under Colonel Spence.

But several of these units did not join the column until the end of May. Warren's chief staff officer was Colonel Heath, and his intelligence officer Colonel Sam Hughes of the Canadian Militia, who had previously acted in the same capacity with Settle (see chap. i., p. 5).

The chief approaches to this plateau are two deeply-wooded kloofs which could easily be held by a few men. The importance of Campbell lay in the fact that the roads north to Kuruman and west to Griquatown passed through it: accordingly, on this well-chosen position above it the rebels determined to concentrate for their last stand.*

May 26, Warren halts at Faber's Put.

Warren moved out of Douglas on May 24, and on the 25th he reconnoitred the rebel position to find out the best spot to attack. It soon appeared that a frontal attack was too dangerous, and that the best chance would be by a turning movement against the left flank at Knoffelfontein. But before this could be attempted Warren was anxious to have Schmidt's Drift guarded to prevent any attempt of the rebels to escape in a north-easterly direction; and the two companies of Paget's Horse detailed for this duty were not due there till May 30. Also, as his supplies were running short, he thought it better to wait for a convoy expected from Belmont. Accordingly, on the 26th, he halted for a few days at Faber's Put, a farmstead a few miles south of Campbell.

Disposition of Warren's force here on night of 29th May.

The camping ground selected was a clearing in the bush about three quarters of a mile from north to south and a mile from east to west, bounded on the north and south by low ridges. In the depression between the two ridges was a pond of water and a little stream, which trickled through a garden to the east. A few kraals were dotted about near the garden, and Faber's Put farmhouse was further west. Another and newer farmhouse stood in the north-eastern corner. It was a difficult camp to defend, as the uncleared bush which surrounded it offered facilities for an enemy to approach unperceived. On the night of the 29th May, the convoy came in from Belmont escorted by a few men of Paget's Horse, and on that night the disposition of Warren's force was as follows: The General's headquarters were at the new farmhouse near the bivouac of four and a half companies of the D.E.O.V.R. under Colonel Spence; the 23rd and 24th companies of Yeomanry with their Colt

* They brought in men here from such distant posts as Koegas and Kheis, in the Prieska direction.

gun under Colonel Crawley, the escort of the convoy and four Canadian guns under Major Hunter Ogilvy were lying by the kraals near the garden, and Colonel Hughes with Warren's Scouts under Captain Mackie were in Faber's Put farmhouse. The infantry provided pickets along the northern front and on a hill to the east of Warren's headquarters; the Yeomanry had a picket on the southern ridge, another to supplement the infantry picket on the north-eastern hill, and a sentry, originally posted in the garden, but subsequently brought by Colonel Crawley closer to the Yeomanry bivouac. Considering the nature of the surrounding bush country and the proximity of the enemy, with whom Warren had been in touch on the 28th, one picket to watch over the southern, south-eastern and south-western sides of the camp was hardly sufficient protection; and in spite of gaps in the circle no arrangement had been made for connecting patrols.*

May 30. The rebels creep round the bivouac.

De Villiers, the chief rebel leader, had noted how exposed to attack the camp was, and knew that Warren's force consisted entirely of Volunteers, who, it was thought, would show little fight; so he laid a bold plan for annihilating them. Taking 600 men with him on the evening of the 29th from Campbell he marched quietly down to Faber's Put, and there posted them in three parties round the camp: the first, composed of men from Hay and Barkly West, under Forster, to the north-east; the second, men of Postmasburg, under Ventner, along the ridge to the south; while he himself, with fifty-six picked shots from the district, went right into the garden between the two ridges. These arrangements had all been carried out by 5.30 on the morning of the 30th, while it was still dusk, and so far not one of these parties

* The rest of the force then actually under Warren's command was distributed as follows on May 29:—

At Steyn's Farm (six miles south of Faber's Put):	
	30 Cape Police
	30 Royal Munster Fusiliers M.I.
	1 Company D.E.O.V.R.
At Douglas:	1½ Companies D.E.O.V.R.
	2 guns Cape Artillery.
At Rooipan (between Douglas and Belmont):	
	½ Company D.E.O.V.R.
At Belmont:	½ Company D.E.O.V.R.

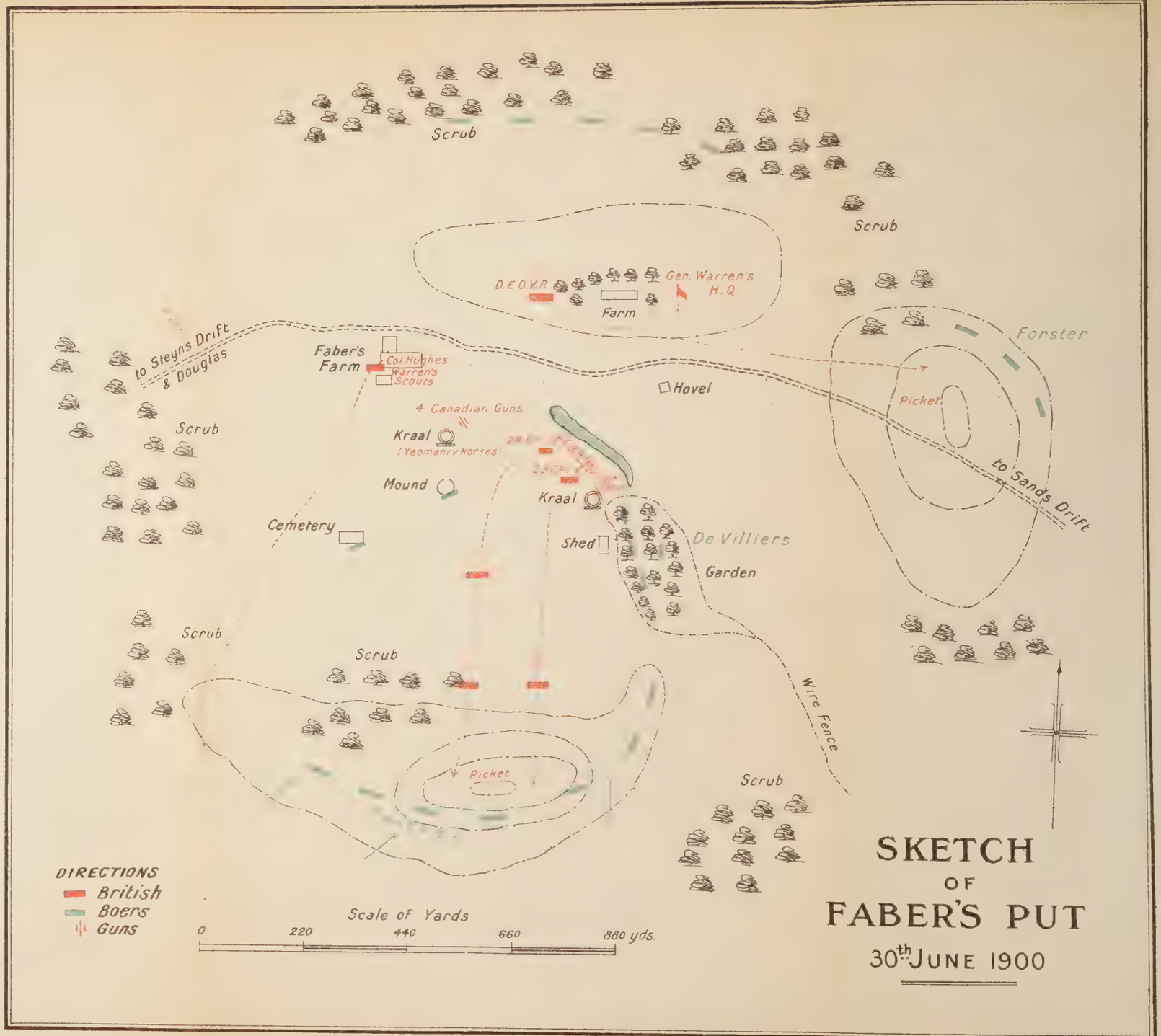
had been observed by any sentry or picket. But just before Forster's party were about to give the pre-arranged signal by firing a shot at the north-eastern picket, a Yeomanry sentry on the southern ridge saw figures looming up before him, and fired off his rifle. Immediately a furious rifle-fire broke out from the north, south, and centre, and the camp was awoken to find itself practically surrounded, and with the rebels in their midst.

Coolness of the British troops in face of the surprise.

At such a time as this there was not much room for generalship, and the officers at each position of the ground had to act on their own initiative. Happily, the officers and the Volunteers under them showed that the rebels had miscalculated in thinking they would fall an easier prey than the Regulars. Warren, who seems to have been the only officer up at the moment of the surprise, quickly sent two companies of the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Volunteer Rifles against Forster's men, who were very soon put to flight, and gave no further trouble. But near the garden the confusion caused by the firing at close quarters on men still in their blankets, and the impossibility of seeing where the enemy was, made the task far more serious. Some of Ventner's men had even crept up to a mound within a hundred yards of the kraals where the Yeomanry horses were corralled, and added greatly to the confusion by stampeding them. At first, all that was realised was that a heavy fire was coming from the southern ridge where the picket had been placed, and from the dam to the south-east, while nobody grasped the fact that the enemy were in the garden. Colonel Hughes rushed out of the farmhouse, and getting together all the men he could find, tried vainly to arrest the stampede of Yeomanry horses, and to keep down the fire of the party of Boers between the kraals and the southern ridge. Colonel Crawley, seeing that the southern ridge was held by the Boers, collected most of his Yeomanry, as they rolled out of their blankets, and began to advance in support of his picket. The Colt gun in the kraal nearest the garden was brought into action to support Crawley's advance, and Major Hunter Ogilvy very wisely, before doing anything else, sent his battery horses to cover. The few men of Paget's Horse

Most of the rebels surrender.

the Transvaal, surrendered their arms. By the beginning of July the country was settling down so satisfactorily that Sir Charles Warren could send off Lord Erroll, with four companies of Imperial Yeomanry, to Klerksdorp, and he considered that a force of 300 infantry to garrison Douglas, Campbell, Griquatown, Daniel's Kuil, Kuruman, and Schmidt's Drift, and 300 Imperial Yeomanry to patrol the district, would be amply sufficient. At the end of the month the expeditionary force was entirely broken up, the police were brought back into the district, which was put in charge of General Settle, and General Warren was allowed to return to England.



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CHAPTER VII

OPERATIONS IN THE EASTERN FREE STATE

Character of the country in the Eastern Free State.

In the Free State the character and importance of the country, and consequently of the operations, on either side of the railway line differed very materially. On the west the large tract between the Modder and the Vet River is scantily supplied with water, the land is flat and sandy, and it contains only one small town; even north of the Vet River it is only near the Vaal itself that the country shows signs of prosperity; at the same time, while there is not much worth defending here, the absence, except in the extreme north, of hills with convenient lurking-places for the commandos, renders the country ill-adapted for Boer tactics of defence. So it was that the English had little trouble on this side; and the line of railway through Kimberley materially facilitated their operations, by removing all cause for anxiety about supplies. The east was very different; it contained some of the richest land south of the Zambesi; all along the Basuto border between Ladybrand and Ficksburg, and further up round Fouriesburg, in the Brandwater basin, stretched what has always been considered the granary of South Africa, and outside of this the comparatively important towns of Winburg, Senekal, Lindley, Bethlehem, Heilbron, Vrede, and Harrismith were all centres of prosperous farming districts. Moreover, the men of this part, besides having most at stake, were the staunchest fighters in the Free State armies. Those of Ficksburg and Ladybrand remembered that their granary was still called "the conquered territory," and that they themselves belonged to the picked families settled there to hold fast what had been so hardly won from the Basutos;

the commandos of Heilbron and Bethlehem, of Harrismith and Senekal, where even the parson led them to battle, were no less determined to uphold the fighting traditions of their race. And the mountainous country they had to defend and to fight in lent itself admirably to their ancestral habits as stalkers of men or of beasts. Starting from Thaba 'Nchu, it presented, step by step, as it were, defensive positions from which an army would often take weeks to dislodge a few men, only to drive them to the range beyond. North of Thaba 'Nchu was the Toba-Houtnek position, and behind it the Babiaansberg, where Hamilton was delayed on his way to Winburg; to the east the Platberg made a formidable barrier to Ladybrand, while north-east the Korrannaberg blocked the way to Ficksburg. Further north again, Senekal was flanked on the west by the Doornberg, in the intricate kloofs and valleys of which the Boers outwitted many British columns, while on the east the Biddulphsberg helped the Boers to at least one triumph over the English, and the Zuringkranz ridge long afforded them a retreat. Lindley's circle of hills became the battleground for fights too numerous to count, and at Vechtkop, midway between Lindley and Heilbron, where in years gone by a few heroic Boer men and women had withstood Mosilikatze's hordes, their descendants loved to waylay the British columns on their way north, as Hamilton, Colvile, Methuen, and Hunter each in turn found to their cost. Then there was the ultimate stronghold, which seemed the best of all, but which proved in the end most fatal, the great circle of the Wittebergen and Roodebergen round the Brandwater basin, impenetrable except for a few gates strongly guarded by Nature.

Concentration of Free State forces east of the railway.

The Boers very soon recognised that the eastern side was the real battle-ground in the Free State. After the dispersal from Wepener and Reddersburg, it will be recollected, all the commandos from those two places concentrated round Thaba 'Nchu and Thaba Pachoa. But when Lord Roberts began to advance, de Wet went with Olivier and Lemmer to the Doornberg, Grobler stood covering Winburg, and Philip Botha took post at Houtnek, where he fought with General Ian Hamilton at the end of April; while General de Villiers,

with the Ficksburg, Wepener, and Smithfield commandos on Thaba Pachoa, lay across Brabant's way to Ladybrand; there were also some small bodies still left round Thaba 'Nchu. Altogether there were probably about 8,000 Free Staters in arms east of the railway, though it is always difficult to estimate the Boer forces with accuracy.

Roberts's dispositions in that quarter.

But Lord Roberts also, as we have seen, had his eastern flank and rear well guarded. Ian Hamilton, supported by Colvile, started on a line parallel to the railway; Rundle, behind them at Thaba 'Nchu, was on the right rear; and behind him again Chermside had instructions to hold the railway lines from Bethulie and Norval's Pont to Bloemfontein, besides supporting Rundle by a chain of garrisons from Bethanie through Dewetsdorp to Wepener. Kelly-Kenny's Sixth Division held Bloemfontein and the waterworks. Thus, without counting Ian Hamilton and Colvile, Lord Roberts had nearly 30,000 men * in the south-eastern Free State.

General Rundle's previous war service.

It was to Lieut.-General Sir Leslie Rundle that the most important part of the operations on the eastern flank was at first assigned. He had already had experience in the Sudan campaign as Lord Kitchener's Chief of the Staff, and though his chief's own absorbing energy had probably left him with less than the usual amount of work in such a post, he had enjoyed every opportunity of learning the methods of swift and successful action under such a master. From his first arrival in South Africa he had been entrusted by the Field-Marshal with considerable responsibility, and though he had achieved no great success in his Dewetsdorp operations, it must be remembered that he was working with a division which had only just landed, and with a force of raw Yeomanry, and he had, at any rate, displayed caution and a strict adherence to Lord Roberts's instructions, qualifications eminently fitting him for the *rôle* now assigned to him by the Field-Marshal. Put briefly, his part was to take up a wide front from the Basuto border to Thaba 'Nchu, to move north gradually, always keeping the Boers in front

The *rôle* entrusted to him.

* Rundle, 10,000; Brabant, 3,000; Kelly-Kenny, 8,000; Chermside, 8,000:—Total, 29,000. (These are the approximate figures.)

of him, and, above all, not to let any of them break away south.* In order to carry out this programme Rundle had at his disposition the 16th and 17th Brigades under Generals Campbell † and Boyes, three field batteries,‡ the 1st, 4th, and 11th battalions of Yeomanry, and the 5th Field Company R.E.;

* Lord Roberts's instructions given below are clear and to the point.

[STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.]

BRANDFORT, *May 4th*, 1900.

"DEAR RUNDLE,—Before I move further, I think it desirable to place you in possession of my general intentions before our advance northwards.

"It seems clear, from what has happened in the past, that if the enemy get an opportunity they will again at once invade the S.E. portion of the Free State. By doing so they will, strategically speaking, have the best chance of injuring us, and should they succeed in getting a footing there, our lines of communication would be materially threatened. It would cause great consternation in Cape Colony, and it would be necessary for me to send back troops from the front, which would materially interfere with my plan of campaign.

"Under these circumstances, I look to you to take such measures as you may consider necessary to prevent any large body of the enemy being able once more to invest Wepener or to move towards Smithfield through the Dewetsdorp-Wepener gap.

"As soon as it can be arranged, Chermside with the Headquarters of the Third Division will proceed to Bloemfontein, and will have under his special charge the line of railway from Bethulie and Norval's Pont up to this point.

"Your duty will be to exercise a vigilant control E. of the railway and to prevent the enemy gaining a footing there.

"My belief is that as we move north, the Boers will find it necessary to withdraw the whole of their troops now in front of Thaba 'Nchu and also the small bodies now roving about the country south of Dewetsdorp.

"As soon as you are satisfied that they have withdrawn in the manner I anticipate, you should move such portion of your force as you think necessary to Ladybrand. With Thaba 'Nchu and Ladybrand occupied in sufficient strength, with Dewetsdorp, Wepener, and Smithfield properly garrisoned, with the people disarmed and their horses taken from them—a measure which is now being thoroughly carried out—the Boers will be quite unable to move S., and even if they do get there they will find no armed and mounted burghers to assist them. . . . ." In an earlier communication Roberts had informed Rundle that he would "eventually occupy and control the country from Dewetsdorp and Ladybrand up towards Senekal, or possibly to Bethlehem."

† The 1st Leinsters, who were in Canada when the mobilisation of the Eighth Division was ordered, did not join Campbell's Brigade till June 8.

‡ See note * on page 97.

LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR H. M. L. RUNDLE, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.,
COMMANDING 8TH DIVISION.

Photo by Elliott & Fry.

and in addition he had under his orders Brabant's Colonial Division of nearly 3,000 men with nine field guns, so that altogether he had nearly 13,000 men. There was, however, very little transport available for Rundle's column, and he was likely to be too far from the railway to be often within reach of supply convoys; he was therefore ordered to obtain his transport locally, and to feed himself on the country.

May 3–17. Rundle advances from Thaba 'Nchu as far as Ladybrand—Clocolan—Trommel.

When French returned to Bloemfontein on May 3 and Rundle assumed chief command at Thaba 'Nchu, the Houtnek position in front of him had already been cleared by Ian Hamilton, but there were still many Boers on the neighbouring mountains, who were driven away only after two or three days' desultory fighting. Brabant, with the Colonial Division, had meanwhile been ordered to come away from Thaba Pachoa and join Rundle's command by way of Dewetsdorp; his march was delayed by the Boers, who followed his movements, and by the bad condition of his transport, so that he only reached Thaba 'Nchu on May 8.* As soon as de Villiers saw that he no longer protected Ladybrand from the Thaba Pachoa position he retired to the Korannaberg, whither de Wet detached the Ladybrand commando under Crowther † to join him. Thereupon Rundle gradually pushed out his troops and made good the country in a semicircle extending from Houtnek in the north through Eden and Egypte to Leeuw River Mills on the east. There was a certain amount of opposition from the Ladybrand and Ficksburg commandos, who made descents from the Korannaberg, but a great many Boers remained on their farms and surrendered. Rundle's movements were undoubtedly slow, partly in accordance with constant instructions from Lord Roberts, who feared any attempt of the Boers to break back south again, partly also because he was expected to draw his supplies from the country. Luckily meat and flour were abundant; at Leeuw River Mills alone he took away 16,200 bags of flour and mealies on one occasion; while in Brabant's Colonials he had

* Rundle caused much gratification to the Colonials by ordering the Eighth Division to line the streets of Thaba 'Nchu as a tribute to the defenders of Wepener.

† See chap. iv., p. 104.

a body of men who could hardly have been surpassed in the art of foraging. But even the best foragers took time. However, once driven away from the neighbourhood of Thaba 'Nchu, the Boers retreated with some precipitation towards Ficksburg and Senekal without even making a stand on the Korannaberg, where, at Mequatling's Nek, a few of them could easily have delayed Rundle's entire force for some days. By May 17 the Colonial Division had taken possession of Ladybrand * and Clocolan, while Rundle was occupying a line further west stretching across from Bresler's Flat to Trommel.

May 24. Ficksburg surrenders to Brabant

So far the Boers in front of Rundle seem to have been infected with the running panic which sent their comrades of the centre in headlong rout before Roberts's main advance, and even Ficksburg yielded without opposition to Brabant on May 24, though a reconnaissance had reported 800 Boers to be there a few days previously. At Senekal, how-

* A characteristic story is told of three men of the Colonial Division who made the first entry on this occasion into Ladybrand, and serves as a pendant to the story of Colonel Pilcher's first entry there less than two months earlier. The three men, hearing that a strong patrol was going to Ladybrand, obtained leave to go there also in order to buy some saddle-stuffing for their company. However, they had not gone far before they discovered that the patrol had apparently been countermanded. They nevertheless went on, determined not to be baulked of their saddle-stuffing. On arriving in Ladybrand, they boldly went up to the landdrost and told him they had come to receive the surrender of the town. He immediately gave up all the official keys; they then hauled down the Free State flag, hoisted the Union Jack, and proceeded to instal themselves in the Government offices, where they accepted the arms which were brought to them for surrender. However, eight Boers, slightly more wide-awake than the rest and seeing that no British force appeared, went up to them to enquire what all this nonsense meant. The three airily explained that their own General was in the vicinity with 1,000 men and General French not far off with 16,000, and that they had been thoughtfully sent forward to receive surrenders in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. Perfectly satisfied with this explanation, the eight Boers also surrendered their arms, and the Colonials, after arresting the gaoler, went to bed. Next morning, after a good breakfast, they reassured a deputation of loyal ladies who complained of the proceedings of some Boer commandos; then, thinking it time to be off, commandeered some carts and drove off with the surrendered arms and the saddle-stuffing, which they had not forgotten to buy. When the column came into Ladybrand next day they found the Union Jack still flying.

ever, Rundle's force saw their first serious fighting since Thaba 'Nchu. On the evening of the 24th of May Rundle's headquarters were at Kopjes Kraal, about eighteen miles south-west of Senekal. On the following morning early he moved out with Campbell's brigade, Boyes following about half a day's march behind, and he instructed Major Dalbiac with the Middlesex Company of Yeomanry, about sixty strong, to go in advance of the column. Major Dalbiac was a man of reckless bravery, who had long been fretting under the absence of serious fighting, and on this day he thought his chance had come; so, instead of keeping in touch with the main body, he galloped his company nearly all the way to Senekal, which he reached about 10.30. The town was found to be deserted of armed Boers, whereupon a few Cossack posts were placed on the outskirts and the rest of the company dispersed, some to seek refreshment, others to collect arms and take surrenders.* About 1 o'clock their security was disturbed by the sound of rifle-fire on the plateau east of the town, where two of the Cossack posts had been placed, and it soon became evident that the Boers were returning to attack them. Hastily collecting the thirty odd men he could find, Major Dalbiac galloped up the plateau, where he and his little party found themselves between a cross fire from Boers who had crept up from the north and the south. They dismounted, and almost immediately Dalbiac fell dead, shot through the neck; soon three others were shot dead and four wounded. The Boers were all well under cover and the Yeomanry were in the open, and no supports were in sight. Thirteen men of the party still unwounded surrendered, though six, under the cool leadership of Sergeant-Major Roller, managed to escape from the hill with one wounded man. Just as the Boers were leaving the plateau with their prisoners the artillery of the main column came up and shelled them, but it was too late. The Boers in this engagement lost Nel, the field-cornet in command, who was accidentally shot by one of his own men. This incident had no further effect than the loss of four brave men shot dead, four wounded, and

May 25. Rundle advances to Senekal.

His advanced party of Yeomanry surprised.

* Major Aston, of Rundle's staff, had also come into the town by this time and was occupied in taking surrenders.

thirteen taken prisoners, but it illustrates the danger of neglecting proper precautions in war. Senekal was then formally occupied by Rundle's troops, and the Boers retreated into the fastnesses of the Biddulphsberg and Zuringkranz.

Distribution of British forces at the end of May.

On May 25, when Rundle reached Senekal, the Field-Marshal was already three days' march north of Kroonstad, Ian Hamilton was crossing over to the left of the railway, and Methuen was on his way from Bothaville to Kroonstad. Chermside, acting as a reserve line, had a battalion and a half and two guns at Smithfield, two battalions, a battery, and some mounted troops at Dewetsdorp, and a battalion, two guns, and some mounted infantry at Wepener; he was also responsible for the railway up to Bloemfontein. Above him Kelly-Kenny had troops at Springfield and the waterworks, at Bloemfontein and on the railway beyond, and he kept an eye on marauders who had put in an appearance at Abraham's Kraal on the west. Rundle's sphere extended as far south as Israel's Poort, Thaba 'Nchu, Leeuw River Mills, and Ladybrand, where he had to keep outposts or garrisons, although he not unreasonably tried to persuade the Commander-in-Chief that these positions were more in Kelly-Kenny's province than his own; he had established communication with Winburg, which was now his base for supplies; and his main position was along a line of about fifty miles, from Ficksburg, through Hammonia, Klip Drift Nek and Klip Drift, up to Senekal, facing Zuringkranz and the range of mountains between Witnek and Commando Nek. He himself now had his headquarters at Senekal, the Colonial Division's headquarters were at Hammonia, with a garrison at Ficksburg; and Yeomanry patrols kept up the connection between his posts. The importance of this line lay in the fact that most of the Boers opposed to him had taken to the mountains, where they were always watching for an opportunity of breaking south again. Colvile had gone no further than Winburg in support of Ian Hamilton, but on May 17, when he was in touch with Rundle at Bresler's Flats, he had been ordered to prolong the line across the eastern Free State by sending MacDonald with a couple of battalions to Ventersburg. This was to be

preparatory to an advance with his whole force, as soon as he was relieved in Winburg by Clements's brigade, which was again detached from Kelly-Kenny's division. On May 22 Clements's troops began to arrive from Smaldeel, and Colvile left Winburg. Thus the general idea may be said to be that of a wedge being driven up from Senekal northwards, the broad end being represented by the army holding all the country south of the line Ficksburg to Smaldeel.

May 22. Colvile leaves Winburg.

General Colvile's command at this time was reduced to MacDonald's Highland Brigade, a company of the Eastern Province Horse, two naval 4·7 guns, and half a company of Engineers. Before leaving Winburg, however, he was reinforced by the 5th Battery R.F.A., and was informed by the Chief of the Staff that the 13th Battalion of Yeomanry would join him at Ventersburg; his orders were to concentrate at Ventersburg on the 23rd, reach Lindley on the 26th, and Heilbron on the 29th of May. At Ventersburg he was duly rejoined by MacDonald with the Black Watch and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, but there was no sign of the Yeomanry battalion. Nevertheless, though his mounted troops only numbered just over 100 of all ranks, he marched away early on the 24th, judging his orders as to the dates for reaching Lindley and Heilbron to be imperative; for though no definite scheme was put before him, he had been led to understand that his presence was required at Heilbron in order to complete Lord Roberts's arrangements for forcing the passage of the Vaal.* In the afternoon of the 25th the Seaforths cleared away some Boers who were holding Spitzkop, one of the numerous peaks so named, which rises out of the plain some twelve miles from Lindley, and on the following day Colvile found the Boers in strength on the Blaauwberg ridge, which commands both sides of the road into Lindley. After Hamilton's occupation of Heilbron, de Wet and Olivier had remained north-east of that town, but Prinsloo, who had first joined them there with the Heilbron commando from Van Reenen's Pass, went south again to Lindley with 1,200 men and one gun.† This was the

His small force and his orders.

May 24. Colvile leaves Ventersburg without Yeomanry promised to him.

* See chap. iv., p. 134.

† *Ibid.*, p. 129.

detachment now facing Colvile in an excellent position for resisting attack. But Colvile, while holding the front with the Black Watch and Highland Light Infantry, skilfully turned the Boer position by flanking movements of the A. and S. Highlanders, the Seaforths, and his mounted men, and entered Lindley with comparatively slight casualties. The Boers dispersed, some in an easterly direction, and some north, to join the commandos between Heilbron and Lindley.

May 26. Reaches Lindley.

The expected Yeomanry still gave no sign of appearing. But though forced, owing to their absence, to use infantry for the work of mounted men, Colvile nevertheless determined to push on and reach Heilbron by the 29th, as he had been ordered. On the 27th he left Lindley, which was immediately reoccupied by the Boers, and, after crossing an arm of the Rhenoster River, camped on the farm Milldraai, having been followed up and worried on the right flank by Prinsloo, who was reinforced by Piet de Wet. Next morning early, before the camp was stirring, the general was aroused by a messenger with a note, which at length gave news of the Yeomanry, but not of the kind hoped for. It ran thus :—" Colonel Spragge to General Colvile.—Found no one in Lindley but Boers—have 500 men but only one day's food, have stopped three miles back on Kroonstad road. I want help to get out without great loss. —B. Spragge, Lieutenant-Colonel. 27-5-1900." Here was a grave dilemma ; Colvile was now eighteen miles from Lindley, and there were only two courses open to him : either he must return with his whole force—for it was impossible to divide the small force he had—and give the help required, which would mean that he could not reach Heilbron by the 29th, as Lord Roberts had directed him, or he must keep his appointment at Heilbron and leave the Yeomanry to fight their way out. In spite of the urgency of the message and his own need for mounted troops, Colvile thought that his orders to be at Heilbron by the 29th were imperative and must stand before everything ; he also thought that he had attracted the bulk of the Boer forces of the district round himself, and that it would still be possible for Spragge to make a way out for himself either to Heilbron or to Kroonstad. This, then, was the course which he directed

May 27. Colvile marches north.

May 28. News comes that Yeomanry are in trouble at Lindley. They ask for help.

But Colvile goes on.

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR H. E. COLVILE, K.C.B.,
COMMANDING 1ST BRIGADE, OCT., 1899.
COMMANDING 9TH DIVISION, FEB., 1900

Photo by Dickinson & Foster.

Spragge to take, and sent an answer to this effect to him by three separate messengers. None of these messengers ever reached Spragge; but all three returned to Colvile that evening, reporting that they had been unable to succeed.

Colvile's fight at Rooipoort.

After he had determined to push on, his own difficulties on this day probably drove all thoughts of the Yeomanry out of Colvile's head. He was now approaching the Vechtkop neighbourhood, the scene of the bygone victory over the Matabele, where already some of Hamilton's large force had been engaged seven days earlier. The Boers on this occasion were holding a position astride the road on the Rooipoort ridge, which is three miles north of Milldraai, as well as on the hills flanking the right advance of Colvile's column. Beyond Rooipoort and across a spruit they held a second position covering the first; in the distance, Vechtkop could be seen looming up on the left front. The H.L.I. and the Black Watch were sent forward to seize the Rooipoort ridge and the Seaforths to make a turning movement on the right, while the A. and S. Highlanders were kept on an isolated kopje in the right rear with two guns as a protection to the transport. The Boers were thrust back from the central ridge without much difficulty, and the guns with which they opened fire from across the spruit were silenced by the two naval guns, but a severe attack was developed by other Boers who had worked round the right flank against the Seaforths and the A. and S. Highlanders. All day long the fight continued, the Scotsmen everywhere stubbornly holding their own, but Colvile was unable to move before the evening, when he pushed the H.L.I., followed by the ox transport, on to the Boers' second position beyond the spruit.

May 29. Colvile reaches Heilbron.

On the 28th, Colvile had advanced only four miles, and next day was that appointed for the entry into Heilbron, still about twenty miles away. Apart from his orders, he was anxious to reach Heilbron, in order to renew his stocks of ammunition and supplies, which were running low; for it had never occurred to him that Hamilton had left the place without an English garrison. However, in case of accidents, on the previous night he had sent a message to the Chief of the Staff fully representing his diffi-

culties, and adding that if he met with much opposition he might be late in Heilbron; he also reported what he knew of Colonel Spragge's plight. Although he had to force his way against Boer rifles and guns on Vechtkop and Spitzkop on his left and right flanks, an operation in which the H.L.I. distinguished themselves by their cool marching under fire, he succeeded in covering the distance to Heilbron by the evening, where he was much disappointed to find no garrison, no supplies, and the telegraph line cut. The march of the Highland Brigade from Winburg here was a fine performance; it would probably have received more general recognition if it had not been associated with the sinister incident at Lindley. In eight days they had marched 130 miles; on five of these days there had been more or less severe fighting, and on one day of these eight the brigade had only advanced four miles. Colvile by this performance had fulfilled his orders to the letter, and he considerably surprised de Wet, who had not expected him so soon, and was meaning to occupy Heilbron with Steyn and Scheepers on the following morning.

May 28. Rundle also receives an appeal for help from Yeomanry.

Meanwhile, Rundle had also received an appeal for help from the Yeomanry. But his own position since he had reached Senekal was not altogether easy. With the necessity of garrisoning the various places to the south of his main line and of keeping open the communications to Winburg, his force had become somewhat weakened, while the Boers in the mountains opposite Brabant and himself gave symptoms of becoming troublesome. On the 26th May, the Hampshire Yeomanry of Rundle's force had made a reconnaissance towards Tafelberg, six miles to the east of Senekal, and had retired with some casualties; on the 27th Brabant had found the Boers in some force at Commando Nek, while on the 28th two of his patrols were cut up near Hammonia. Moreover, when originally proposing the advance to Senekal, Rundle had promised Roberts to be ready if necessary to support Brabant. Accordingly when, on the morning of the 28th, he received the following note from Colonel Spragge—"Was sent to Lindley with 500 Mounted Infantry to catch General Colvile; found him gone and

Boers there. Village a nasty place to retire from—have only one day's food and shall find it difficult to get out without help. Am three miles on Kroonstad road.—B. Spragge, Lieutenant-Colonel, 13th Imp. Yeo. 27–5–1900"—he did not see his way to marching the forty miles to Lindley. However, he immediately telegraphed this information to General Brabant at Hammonia, adding that he hoped to divert the attention of the Boers from Spragge by moving out in force on the Bethlehem road to the east. The Boers, who made a practice of tapping the wires, read this telegram and laid their plans accordingly.

Rundle decides to create a diversion.

On the 28th Rundle, leaving General Boyes with two battalions, a battery, and some Yeomanry in Senekal, moved out with about 4,000 men, consisting of Campbell's Brigade, two batteries, and some mounted troops,* to the Zand Spruit, five miles east of Senekal on the Bethlehem Road. Four miles further east, Boers from the Ladybrand and Senekal commandos under General de Villiers and the two Crowthers held positions on the Tafelberg, commanding the road from the south, and the Biddulphsberg, commanding it from the north. On the 28th the Yeomanry drew fire from the Boers on the north-west of the Biddulphsberg, so on the 29th Rundle determined to avoid the trap laid for him by leaving the direct road to Bethlehem and turning his attack on the northern face of the Biddulphsberg. To cover this change of direction, he kept one company of Yeomanry to hold the Boers on the Tafelberg and another to their left opposite the south-western face of the Biddulphsberg, supporting the latter by three companies of the East Yorks and two guns placed on Guarrie Kop, two miles further west. The rest of the East Yorks remained to guard the baggage behind Guarrie Kop. He then sent three companies of Yeomanry round to the east of the Biddulphsberg to prevent any reinforcements coming to the Boers from Bethlehem, and advanced himself with his main body by the road skirting the north of the mountain. But de Villiers was not deceived with regard to Rundle's

Marches towards Bethlehem.

May 29. Rundle attacks J. H. de Villiers on Biddulphsberg.

* Five companies I.Y., 2nd and 79th R.F.A., 2nd Grenadier Guards, 2nd Scots Guards, 2nd East Yorks, 2nd R. West Kents, Driscoll's Scouts, Ammunition Column, 21st Bearer Co., Field Hospital, half No. 5 Co. R.E.

intentions by the containing forces to the west, and rapidly altered his dispositions so as to command the English line of march. He concealed most of his men behind stones on the lower slopes of the north-western and northern faces of the Biddulphsberg, in a farmhouse which nestles under the eastern side, and in a donga which ran in a north-easterly direction from the farm. One Krupp gun and a pom-pom were placed near the farmhouse, and another Krupp on a ridge further east. Rundle made no attempt to reconnoitre the Boer positions with his mounted men, but on arriving north of the mountain opened an ineffective fire with the 2nd Battery on the north-western face of the mountain, on its summit, where there were no Boers, and on the farmstead, whence the Krupp responded. After some time two sections of the 79th Battery came up and opened fire with better effect, temporarily silencing the Boer gun. All this time the Boer riflemen on the slopes of the mountain and the donga had made no sign, but as soon as the Grenadiers had advanced to within 1,200 yards of the mountain the gun at the farmstead gave tongue again, and the Boers began to shoot from their protected positions. The Grenadiers were now in a regular trap, for their enemies enfiladed them from the donga, and made them an easy mark from their frontal positions at the bottom of the berg and from the homestead; thus they could neither advance nor retire. At first the grass on the plain gave them some protection, for it had not been burnt for some years, and was particularly long and luxuriant, but it soon caused a worse disaster, for a chance match set it all alight behind them, and the fire, fanned by the wind, surged forward and enveloped them in flames. Many, even of those who had the full use of their limbs, were badly singed, but it was far worse for some of the wounded, who had to lie helpless as the flames lapped them round and burnt them to death. Happily, one may believe that those who suffered this ghastly death were few, as, in spite of the fire and the bullets of the enemy, men of all ranks worked nobly at dragging the wounded back to the rear. Meanwhile the Scots Guards had been brought up on the right of the Grenadiers and drew some of the Boer fire

The attack fails.

from their comrades, who thus had some slight respite afforded them for retiring; the West Kents also supported the general retirement, which was ordered at 3.30 P.M. Rundle's casualties on this unfortunate day amounted to 180, among the wounded being the colonels of the two Guards' battalions, while the Boers lost about forty, including General J. H. de Villiers, who was brought in wounded to the English hospital next day.*

Criticism of the operation.

Altogether this was not a day with which General Rundle had any reason to feel satisfied. Owing to the want of proper reconnaissance he delivered his attack in entire ignorance of the Boer position; for while he was under the impression that he had turned the Boer flank, he was really making a frontal attack on what had become their main position. Still, when he had once committed himself to the attack he should have kept it up if necessary till dusk, for most of his casualties occurred during the retirement, before the Scots Guards and West Kents had been able to take much part in the advance. Rundle's motive for retiring so soon was the receipt on the field of battle of a telegram, three days old, from Roberts, informing him that Clements was on his way to relieve him at Senekal and that he should devote his energies to the Ficksburg district, and of another from Brabant announcing the mishap to his patrols. But these were hardly sufficient reasons for not attempting to retrieve his defeat, when he was actually engaged. Strategically, although de Villiers was reported to have been reinforced by some men from Lindley, this battle had no influence on the fate of Colonel Spragge's force, and, as Lindley was forty miles off, no other result was to have been expected. On the other hand, the success gained by the Boers served to refresh their waning courage at a critical time of almost universal disaster for their arms, and their official accounts very naturally magnified the occasion for all it was worth.

Roberts sends Methuen to assist Yeomanry.

Colvile and Rundle had now failed to do anything for the Yeomanry, and at this juncture Lord Roberts, being informed of the difficulty, took over the direction of affairs. Lord Methuen had arrived at Kroonstad on May 28,† and

* Some months later he died in hospital.

† See chap. vi., p. 223.

had there found that Lord Roberts's intentions were that he should strengthen the defences of that town against a commando said to be threatening it, and push on with as many troops as could be spared to Lindley and thence on to Reitz. On the 29th Lord Roberts had received Colvile's message of the 28th, and thinking from its tone that his need for help was most urgent, had told Lord Methuen to press forward to Colvile's relief and then open up telegraphic communication at Heilbron; but on the 30th, realising from a telegram which Rundle sent him on the 29th, how serious Spragge's difficulties were, he added that after relieving Colvile his first business should be to see what he could do for the Yeomanry. Methuen lost no time and started on the same day with Douglas's Brigade, 14 field guns, and three battalions (3rd, 5th, and 10th) of Yeomanry. When ten miles in a north-easterly direction out of Kroonstad he heard that Colvile was safely in Heilbron, so leaving Douglas to follow on with the infantry he hurried on with his mounted troops in the Lindley direction. Next day he was met by a messenger from Colonel Spragge with the assurance that the Yeomanry could hold out till Saturday, June 2. On June 1, Methuen found a screen of Boers blocking his way at Paardeplaats, eight miles from Lindley; these he dispersed, and with his Yeomanry drove the Boers on from ridge to ridge. About 2 o'clock Colonel Younghusband with the 3rd battalion came into touch with their convoy retreating with prisoners. For the Yeomanry had surrendered on the previous day. Colonel Younghusband dashed into the middle of the convoy and cut off some of the wagons, but he was too weak to pursue those containing the prisoners, the other battalions were too far away to send him the aid he asked for, and the Boers gathering round him made the kopje he was holding untenable. He was, therefore, forced to withdraw after a gallant attempt, and the Boers carried off their prisoners.

June 1. Methuen catches up Boer rear-guard too late, as Yeomanry have surrendered.

The force round which the operations of three divisions of the British Army had centred for the last few days was the 13th Battalion of the Imperial Yeomanry, between 400 and 500 strong, with two Colt guns, under the command of Colonel Spragge. It was composed of the Duke of Cam-

Composition of the 13th Bn. I.Y. under Col. Spragge.

bridge's Own (47th Company) and three Irish Companies, two (46th and 54th, Ulster) raised in Belfast and one (45th, Irish Hunt) in Dublin. The formation of the first of these companies had aroused special interest in England, as the troopers were mostly men of gentle birth and wealth, who found all their own equipment and handed over their pay to a military charity, but in other respects it differed little from the rest of the Yeomanry corps, except, perhaps, in being composed of even rawer enthusiasts than the generality. But the interest aroused in England by the D.C.O. Company was at least equalled by that which it excited among the Boers, who had a quite exaggerated opinion of the importance and wealth of the troopers. The Irish companies were entirely new levies, as no Volunteers or Yeomanry corps had previously been permitted in Ireland. For some time after landing the D.C.O.'s and the Dublin Company had been at Matjesfontein in Cape Colony guarding lines of communication, the D.C.O.'s bearing out their reputation for wealth by the luxuries with which they mitigated the dreary sojourn at this arid station on the Karroo. The two Ulster Companies remained at Maitland camp until the whole battalion was summoned to Bloemfontein in the middle of May, and thence a few days later to join Colvile's column at Ventersburg Road on May 23. There was some delay in despatching the whole battalion, as two companies were at the waterworks and Thaba 'Nchu, but one company reached Ventersburg Road on the 23rd, when Colvile was waiting for them at Ventersburg, only ten miles off. Colonel Spragge, however, whose orders had not been very definite, thought it best for all to go on to Kroonstad to replenish his stores of provisions. The whole battalion was assembled at Kroonstad by the 25th. Here Colonel Spragge was shown a telegram addressed to the commandant, with instructions to the Yeomanry to join Colvile at Lindley.*

May 25. Spragge reaches Kroonstad,

* There has always been some mystery as to the origin of this telegram. At one time Colvile was believed to have sent it; but he certainly did not. Another theory was that the Boers sent it through a friendly telegraphist. But there is no reason why they should have, since the junction of the Yeomanry with Colvile was exactly what Colvile required. The most probable source is the headquarters staff.

and starts for Lindley.

On the evening of the 25th, having obtained two days' rations, the battalion marched out towards Lindley. On the way there next day they met some Boers, who told them that Colvile was in Lindley; these men, instead of being held as prisoners, had their rifles taken away and were then dismissed to their farms. They naturally returned to Lindley and told their friends what they had seen. On the

May 27. Finds Colvile has left Lindley, which is occupied by Boers.

27th, about midday, the Yeomanry arrived in Lindley, seeing at a distance of less than ten miles the dust of Colvile's column, which, they were told in Lindley, had left only that morning. The town seemed ominously deserted, and most of the people were too frightened to give any information. As a matter of fact the Boers had reoccupied it for the second time as soon as Colvile left, and were now on the hills above, ready for the Yeomanry. Fire was opened on the leading squadrons almost as soon as they entered the town, and Spragge, realising that Lindley was a regular trap, commanded at short range on all sides, placed a few troops as a covering force on some higher ground not yet occupied, and ordered the rest to fall back on the baggage,

Spragge retires two miles, and prepares for a siege.

about two miles north-west of Lindley, on the upper Kroonstad road. Here, instead of following up Colvile at once, he chose a position for defence. To the south-west of the road a valley, 500 yards wide, containing a farmhouse and

His position.

a dam, branches off towards the Valsch River. This valley is bounded on the north by a low plateau, which rises again to a ridge containing two conical kopjes. Close to the plateau, between it and Lindley on the south-east, two stony kopjes rise out of the valley about 200 yards apart. From the banks of the Valsch on the south and from a long kopje on the west, the valley and the plateau are commanded at a range of something under a mile. North and north-east, and about a mile away, two other ridges dominate the conical kopjes. Colonel Spragge kept his horses and parked his transport in the valley, where there was water and pasturage. The two stony kopjes which formed the left flank of the position were assigned to the D.C.O. Company (Captain Keith) to hold, a kraal at the eastern end of the plateau was used as the headquarters and defended by the Irish

Hunt Company (Captain Lord Longford), and the south-western end of the plateau, which was the right flank of the position, by the 46th Ulster Company (Captain Maude), while the 54th Ulster Company (Captain Humby) were kept in the valley as reserve and as guard to the transport and horses; the Irish Hunt Company also provided outposts on the conical hills in rear. The ground, except on the right flank, did not lend itself easily to intrenching, and, as there were very few intrenching tools in the battalion, little beyond the heaping up of a few stone sangars could be done to add to the natural strength of the positions. On the first evening Spragge sent out the messages which have been already noted to Colvile and Rundle, and settled himself down to withstand a siege. He collected all the provisions under his own eye at the headquarters kraal, and was fortunately able to supplement the two days' rations brought in the wagons by a flock of sheep captured on the first evening.

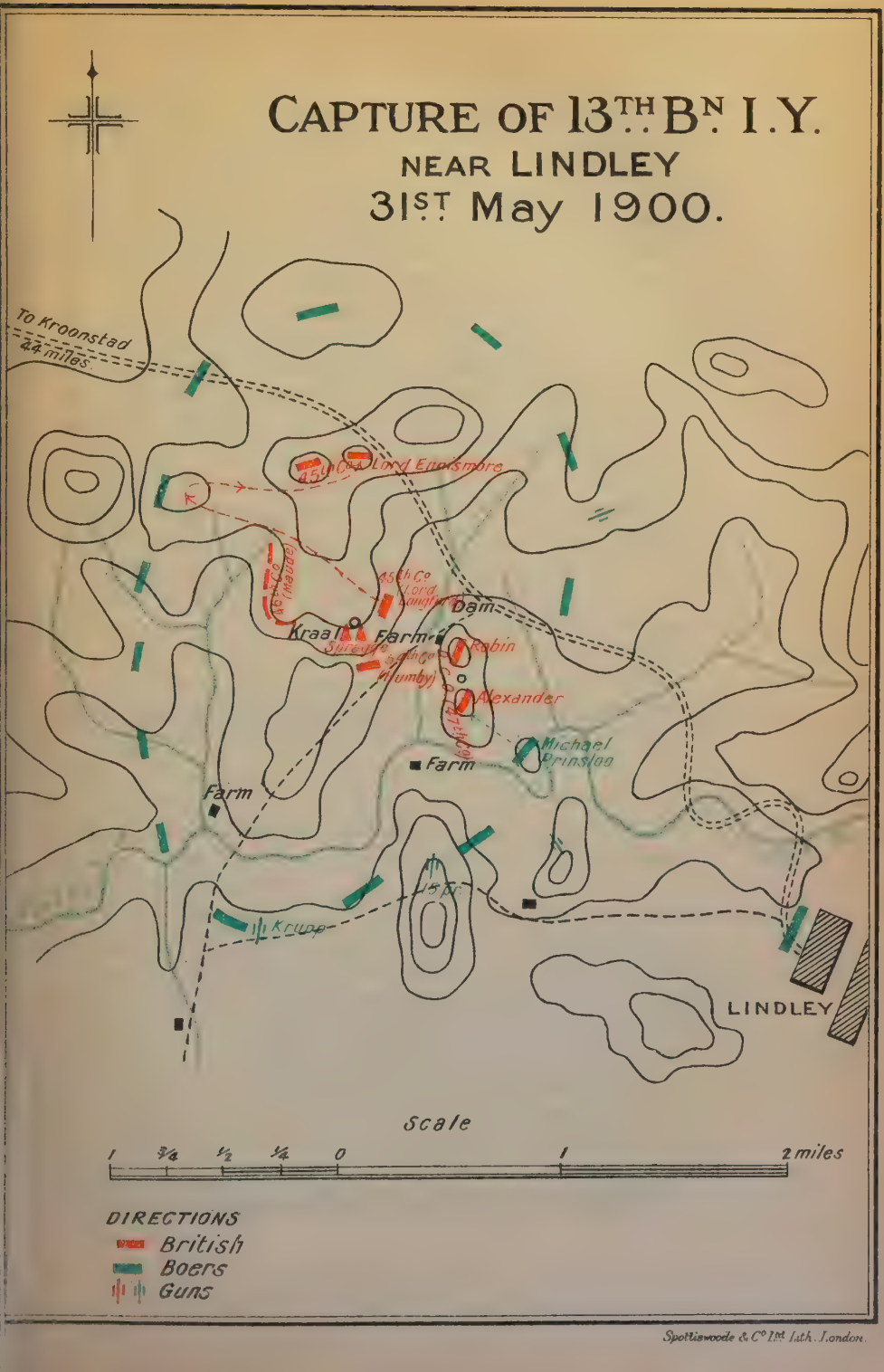
May 27–30. Progress of the investment.

On the 27th the Boers were content with driving the Yeomanry out of Lindley, but on the 28th, when Prinsloo had returned to take command, they began to surround the position. They established themselves in two farms south of the Valsch, from which they could snipe at watering-parties in the valley or at men sent down from Maude's position to get food for his company. They also harassed Maude from the ridge to the west, and some were posted on the two ridges to the north-east and north, from which they had the D.C.O.'s and Lord Longford's outposts within range. However, at first the Yeomanry had no guns against them, and though in an uncomfortable position they easily held their own on the 28th and 29th, and even turned Boer snipers out of two places of vantage near the river, their only serious loss being the death of Captain Keith, a brave and resourceful officer, in command of the D.C.O.'s. In fact, during both these days it would have been easy for Spragge to retire on Kroonstad, with the possible loss of his transport, as the Boers were neither strong enough to surround him completely nor did they display less than their usual apathy in an investment. But on the evening of the 29th Piet de Wet arrived with guns and reinforcements from his fight with Colvile near

Heilbron, thus bringing up the number of Boers besieging the Yeomanry to about 2,000, and introduced more vigour into the proceedings. On the 30th the circle began to be more closely drawn in. Colonel Spragge then found that his grazing-ground was becoming restricted, and that, as he had no more forage left for his sheep and horses, he must attempt to enlarge it; so he sent a party of sixteen men from Maude's company under Lieutenant Montgomery to seize the ridge 2,000 yards to the west, whence the Boer marksmen were giving trouble. Montgomery's band was small for such an undertaking, being still further reduced by the fact that five men hung back, and it is not easy to understand why Spragge did not use some of Humby's company, which was in reserve and unemployed, for the purpose. Montgomery obtained a footing on the ridge; but in the afternoon the remainder of his party were surprised and taken prisoners by the Boers. Early next morning Lord Longford, with fifty men, was sent to recapture this position; the Boers were surprised this time, and were driven off by a bayonet charge.

May 31. P. de Wet and Prinsloo bring up guns and reinforcements. Spragge surrenders to them.

But during the night Prinsloo and de Wet had brought three of their guns into position south of the Valsch, and in the course of the morning a fourth on the flat-topped kopje about a mile and a quarter north of the D.C.O.'s. Soon after dawn gun-fire from the south was opened on Lord Longford and the stony kopjes held by the D.C.O.'s, and at the same time Boer marksmen began resolutely advancing from the south and west against them. Lord Longford was ordered to retire to the more easterly of the two kopjes on the main plateau, where Lord Ennismore already was with the rest of the 45th Company. Then, for a time, all the Boer fire was concentrated on the D.C.O. kopjes which were seen to be the key of the position. Under cover of this fire, Michael Prinsloo, a brother of the general, and about 200 men galloped up to the kopje furthest from the plateau, which was held by a few men under Lieutenant Alexander, and ensconced themselves under the boulders on its southern slope. Alexander found the fire so hot that he thereupon ordered a retreat behind the nearer kopje where Lieut. Robin was in command. Between the two kopjes was a connecting post of a few men



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under a corporal. This man, in an access of panic, put up the white flag, and was immediately shot by his comrades on Robin's kopje. Still this kopje was uncaptured, and as long as that held out Colonel Spragge saw that the position was not desperate, and that the further point might even be regained, so he sent Captain Humby with the 54th Company to reinforce Robin. This reinforcement should no doubt have been sent earlier and on to Alexander's kopje, for when it arrived on the near kopje the position had already been surrendered to the Boers; for Lieut. Robin, under the mistaken notion that he was bound by the white flag hoisted by his subordinate, had also ordered the cease-fire. The Boers then completely commanded the valley where all the transport was parked, besides the plateau held by the 45th and 46th Companies; so Colonel Spragge, seeing that further effort was useless, also surrendered. Lord Longford, who had shown himself a most gallant officer throughout, with his party of the 45th in the position to the rear, and Captain Maude with the 46th on the west of the plateau, held out for a little longer, but they finally had to give in, as they were entirely surrounded. Thus the whole battalion became prisoners of war. The British casualties during the five days' fighting out of the total force of 468 of all ranks were 7 officers and 73 men, of whom 25 were killed. The Boers under Piet de Wet and Prinsloo had on the last day about 2,000 men, chiefly of the Smithfield, Lindley, and Bethlehem commandos, with four guns and two Maxims; they had about 30 men killed and 40 wounded during the engagement.

Criticisms.

This incident acquired a somewhat undue importance at the time, partly for sentimental reasons and partly owing to its influence on General Colvile's position. This general was the only officer to suffer for his share in this disaster, for shortly after this event he was told by Lord Roberts that he might return to England; and the Highland Brigade was left in sole charge of MacDonald. It must be admitted that Colvile was placed in a very difficult position. On the one hand he had been led to believe that his presence at Heilbron by a certain date was essential to Lord Roberts's plans, on the other hand there was the very definite appeal

General Colvile's error of judgment.

for help from a part of the force which had been assigned to him. But it is in the happy solution of such difficulties that a general's fitness for high command can best be tested. General Colvile not only made no attempt to rescue the Yeomanry, but when his messengers sent to Spragge on the morning of the 28th returned the same evening without having performed their mission he apparently took no further trouble about them. Even on the literal interpretation of his orders from headquarters he was not demonstrably right, for though he had been told to be at Heilbron on the 29th, he had also been told that he was to be joined by some Yeomanry. His own march was considerably hampered and delayed for want of the very men he was asked to rescue, and, for all he knew, he might be useless without them for Lord Roberts's purpose at Heilbron. Apart from this consideration, whatever his orders may have been, only some overwhelming and certain advantage to the general cause could justify a general in thus abandoning part of his force. The advantage was not certain, and Spragge's ability to escape had nothing to do with Colvile, who certainly had every reason to think from Spragge's message that he was in serious danger. Napoleon's words, "a general-in-chief has no right to shelter his mistakes, in war, under cover of his sovereign or of a minister, when they are both distant from the scene of operation, and must consequently be either ill-informed or wholly ignorant of the actual state of things," are just as applicable to a subordinate general's relations to his commander-in-chief. Once before, at Sannah's Post, General Colvile had shown a want of vigour in his attempts to retrieve a disaster; on this occasion he showed his inability to realise that an officer in his high and responsible position must take the risk of acting according to circumstances in spite even of his orders.

Colonel Spragge quite unnecessarily besieged.

On the other hand, it is impossible to find an excuse for Colonel Spragge, with a mounted force of 500 men, in allowing himself to be cut off by a force of Boers who, until the last day, did not largely exceed his own. There was no reason why, instead of sending despairing appeals to Colvile and Rundle, he should not have attempted to follow up Colvile as soon as he found that he had gone on, or, failing that, up

till the 29th he could easily have retired to Kroonstad with the possible loss of his transport, for there was obviously no reason to hold the position as he had not been able to join Colvile. Moreover, it is at least questionable if the surrender on the last day would have been necessary, if Colonel Spragge had kept in closer touch with his outlying posts and had sent Humby earlier to reinforce the vulnerable D.C.O. Kopjes.

Real importance of the incident.

But the real importance of the incident is that it was one of many indications that, however successful the general advance had been, Lord Roberts had left behind him a great deal of very serious work to be accomplished. It also revealed serious defects in the system at headquarters. The staff arrangements, whereby Spragge was late for his appointment with Colvile, and insufficient precautions were taken to keep in touch with forces of the size of Colvile's and Spragge's and ensure that there should be no hitch about their meeting, are responsible in the first instance. Lord Roberts attempted to keep in touch with all the columns in South Africa, and as a rule allowed little latitude to his subordinates. Whether such a system was right or wrong, an essential for its success was to have a perfectly-organised and fully-informed staff: and this was by no means the case.

In spite of these successes depressed condition of the Free State Boers.

In spite of the two successes at Lindley and Biddulphsberg, the Free State Boers seemed at this time in an almost more desperate condition than at any other. Not only had Roberts's advance put the fear of the British arms into their hearts, but now they heard that Buller was nearly through Natal and might soon appear to take them in rear or on the flank. Against Rundle's advance there had so far been hardly any stand, and on the western side of the State Methuen and Hunter had been little troubled since the beginning of May. Mafeking had been relieved, and with it the last chance of dealing a serious blow at British prestige had gone. Johannesburg was taken and Pretoria was about to fall. South of Bloemfontein along the railway and as far north as the Bothaville district the burghers were peacefully cultivating their farms as if there were no such thing as a war, while the British commanders at Winburg and Senekal had been almost daily receiving surrenders. Reckoning up

the total Free State forces in the field about this time de Wet says that the Philippolis and Hoopstad commandos had entirely surrendered, that the Bloemfontein, Bethulie, Fauresmith, Jacobsdal, and Boshof commandos could only muster 437 men among them, and that of the eleven remaining those of Ficksburg, Bethlehem, Harrismith, and Vrede were the only commandos which were anything like up to strength; altogether he says there may have been about 8,000 Free Staters in the field at this time. And even those who were in the field seemed, with a few exceptions, more intent on waiting the turn of events than on doing any harm to the enemy, keeping, as they did, to the natural fastnesses of their country, such as the Drakensberg, the Wittebergen, Zuringkranz, and the Doornberg, which held most of them safe but harmless. Indeed, the only forces which had recently shown much energy were those round Lindley and Heilbron under Piet de Wet, Prinsloo, Steenekamp, Froneman, Du Plooy, Nel, Olivier, and Fourie.

C. de Wet comes forward again. His character.

It was just at this second black period of the Boer cause that Christiaan de Wet again came forward, and again roused the hopes, not only of his own people, but also of the Transvaalers, by his brilliant revival of the form of warfare which was carried on with varying success by his countrymen all over South Africa till the peace in May 1902, a system of surprise marches, of attacking the enemy's weak points, of cutting their railways, of seizing their isolated garrisons, and of skilfully avoiding capture by rapid flight from pursuing columns. It was a wearing, worrying war to the British, however little it may have left the final issue doubtful. De Wet and his imitators hoped in the first place that by this system they might tire out their opponents sufficiently to gain from them some considerable concession as the price of peace, and even if that hope failed, there was the certainty of doing them considerable damage and putting them to vast expense, at very little real risk to the Boers. Christiaan de Wet himself had all the qualities of a guerilla leader. Before the war, a keen man of business, but silent and not much known by his fellow-citizens, he brought all the speculator's eye for a bold *coup* to the game of war, and

imposed respect for his leadership by his victories and his savage determination. He ruled his men sternly, and his success, like that of all the Boer leaders who held their place in the forefront during this war, was chiefly due to the severe discipline which he enforced on men who had never before known what discipline was. The stories told of his keeping his men in order with the sjambok are probably exaggerated, but he undoubtedly made them fear and obey. He rarely told them what he meant them to do; they simply had to follow him. Never popular with the men under his command, he was not liked by the colleagues with whom he had to act, for, like all guerilla leaders, he worked almost entirely on his own schemes, and not infrequently disappointed those who expected his co-operation. On the other hand, his rapid, almost uncanny, successes made his a name to conjure with among his own men, and in the British Army. He had a grim humour, which was not seldom displayed in an exaggerated politeness to his frequent captives from the British Army, though later on, when he became soured with disappointment, this trait seems to have disappeared. Hunted by almost every British general all over South Africa, he was never caught, and every failure on the British side seemed almost to be condoned if he was supposed to have had a hand in it. His achievements were also, no doubt, multiplied in the popular estimation by his habit of never stopping long with any one commando, but of flitting about from one to the other to give directions; hence, on his own side it was said that "he who sees de Wet in the morning does not know where he is that evening," and a Natal paper once gravely reported of him that he had been on the Delagoa Railway line, at Lindley, Wepener, Dewetsdorp, and Aliwal North, all in the course of one week. The mastering passions which carried him through were an intense love of his country and an equally strong hatred of the English and of those who yielded to them; on the rare occasions when he had allowed his feelings play in addressing his burghers, his love of his country gave dignity to his utterances, and his hatred of those he regarded as traitors to the cause did not yield even to the softer feelings of family

affection, for it is said that when his brother Piet submitted, he ordered his men, if they met him, to shoot him like a mad dog.

June 4. De Wet surprises convoy at Zwavelkranz.

Since the time that he had been driven away from Heilbron by Ian Hamilton, Christiaan de Wet had been at Frankfort with Steyn and the Boer Government, waiting for some ammunition which was expected from Greylingstad. On getting it he marched, accompanied by the president, towards Heilbron. But he had been forestalled there by Colvile, so, after establishing Steyn's quarters at President's Kopje, twelve miles north-east of the town, he went on himself with part of his force towards the railway. On the way there he heard, apparently from a spy in British employment, of a convoy of fifty-six wagons being sent to Heilbron under an escort of 160 "details" and no guns. This convoy was taking to Colvile the food so badly needed by his men, and it seems to have been due to the chaotic state of authority on the line north of Kroonstad that, on June 2, in spite of Colvile's earnest representations for a strong escort, it was allowed to drift away from Roodewal on the railway in this almost unprotected condition. On the evening of June 3, when the convoy had reached Zwavelkranz, half way on its journey, de Wet's force was discovered blocking the way to Heilbron. A messenger was sent to railhead at Vredefort Road for reinforcements, and the convoy was parked for defence. Next morning de Wet informed Lieut. Corballis, who was in charge of the convoy, that he had 1,200 men and five guns and demanded his surrender. While Corballis was discussing details to gain time, the messenger previously sent to Vredefort Road came in to say that Major Haig, of the K.O.S.B.'s, had come within four miles of the convoy with 600 men, but that, neither seeing nor hearing any signs of it, he had then retired. Though the messenger was sent back to urge him to return, Haig proceeded on his way to Vredefort Road. There was then nothing for the convoy to do but surrender. Undoubtedly Corballis, after sending for relief, should at least have fired some shots to attract attention, but Haig was still more to blame for not verifying the position of the convoy before retiring; while the disaster could have been avoided altogether if Major Haking, the commandant at

railhead, had not neglected Colvile's warning and allowed the convoy to start with so small an escort.

Defenceless condition of Roberts's communications.

De Wet sent off his prisoners and convoy to the main laager and retired himself to Valfontein, about eight miles further south. He there heard from his small band of scouts under Scheepers of the admirable opportunity which presented itself of cutting Lord Roberts's communications. Since leaving Kroonstad Lord Roberts had advanced with such rapidity that the process of securing communications by repairing the line and bringing up troops behind it could not keep pace with his progress, and until he was in possession of Pretoria he could not spare men from his own army to leave behind on the railway. One brigade he had spared for Johannesburg, but otherwise for a fortnight the line from Kroonstad northwards was unguarded except for the small escorts which accompanied the repairing parties of the Royal Engineers and of the Railway Pioneer Regiment as they brought railhead further and further up. Even at Kroonstad the only garrison from May 22 to June 6 was one Militia battalion. Indeed, for more than a week after Roberts left, it was almost literally true, as Kruger informed one of his generals, that from Kroonstad to Johannesburg the English had no rearguard, while at Kroonstad itself there were only sick and maimed.

Uncertainty as to responsibility for them.

To make matters worse, the responsibility for the lines of communication was very ill-defined. In some parts troops were constantly coming to posts and moving off again. The senior officer for the time being became commandant, but he had no real interest in the post which he might be leaving in a few days or less. For the whole length of the lines of communication nobody was responsible. On May 20 Lord Roberts told General Kelly-Kenny that Colonel Rainsford Hannay was to be in charge of the lines of communication from Bloemfontein to the front and to take his orders directly from Army Headquarters; it was not till nine days later that Rainsford Hannay was discovered to be in hospital and that Kelly-Kenny was put in supreme command from the Orange to the Zand rivers. He was then told to use W. G. Knox's brigade from Chermside's division to hold the posts south of

Bloemfontein and Allen's for those to the north. Even then the communications north of the Zand River were kept under the fitful control of headquarters, and without Kelly-Kenny's knowledge the Derby militia were suddenly moved up at the beginning of June from their post on the Zand River to the Rhenoster River. Moreover, when responsibilities were defined, insufficient care was taken to inform all concerned, for as late as the 12th June General Forestier-Walker telegraphed to Kelly-Kenny from Cape Colony enquiring who was responsible for the line of communications north of the Orange River.

June 6. General disposition of English troops in eastern Free State.

The general disposition of troops in the eastern Free State on the 6th June, when the railway had been repaired beyond Vredefort Road and troops had begun to arrive north of the Zand River, was as follows. After his failure to relieve the Zwavelkranz convoy, Major Haig, who was in command of 1,000 "details" from various infantry regiments, had moved up to railhead a few miles further north, leaving a detachment of thirty men to guard the stores at Vredefort Road. Seven companies of the Derby Militia and some Colonial scouts were at Rhenoster River bridge; and at Roodewal, three miles further south, one company of that battalion, with a company of the Railway Pioneer Regiment, amounting altogether to about 150 men, were guarding a large consignment of stores left on the side of the railway. Lastly Lord Roberts, on hearing of de Wet's presence near the railway, had ordered Kelly-Kenny to reinforce the garrison of Kroonstad with the Buffs and the Oxfordshire L.I., some Yeomanry, and the 17th Battery, all under the command of General C. E. Knox. On May 31 Clements took over the command at Senekal, leaving only half a battalion at Winburg, and Rundle was holding off the Boers in the Wittebergen by a chain of posts extending south of Senekal as far as Ficksburg. There were also garrisons at Ladybrand, Wepener, Dewetsdorp, Thaba 'Nchu, and the waterworks, and at various posts on the railway south of Kroonstad.

But these precautions were not sufficient defence against de Wet. On the 6th he divided his force into three columns, for the purpose of delivering three simultaneous attacks on

the railway next day. The northern column consisted of 300 men with one Krupp under Field-Cornet Steenekamp, their objective being Vredefort Road Station; the main body, with four field guns and a pom-pom under General Froneman and Field-Cornets Du Plooy and Nel, was sent to surprise the Derbys at Rhenoster River; the third party, which was the smallest, was led by de Wet himself to Roodewal. All three columns arrived at their appointed destinations before daybreak of the 7th, and met with complete success. Steenekamp overpowered the small garrison at Vredefort Road, and captured the stores, but he was afterwards engaged in a running fight with the rest of Major Haig's details, who had hurried down by train on learning of the attack. The Derbys, who had only arrived the night before, were holding an outpost line of two and a half miles with two companies. In the morning they found themselves surrounded, and, though they made a brave fight for four hours, it was hopeless from the first. After losing 36 killed and 104 wounded they surrendered. The bridge over the Rhenoster River, which had just been repaired by the Engineers, was naturally again destroyed. At Roodewal the garrison, on hearing of de Wet's advance, intrenched themselves as best they could behind the railway embankment with the aid of the stores they were guarding, and de Wet was unable to secure the position until he was reinforced by the main body and the guns after the surrender of the Derbys. The stores here, said to have been of the value of £100,000, were looted by the Boers, and all that could not be carried away, including the mails, were burnt on the veld; communication between Kroonstad and Pretoria was cut, and the line for several miles was completely broken up.

June 7. De Wet cuts the line and loots stores at Vredefort Road, Rhenoster River and Roodewal.

Communication between Kroonstad and Pretoria cut off.

It was now that Lord Roberts's wisdom in leaving a man of Kelly-Kenny's calibre at Bloemfontein became evident. As soon as Kelly-Kenny found that the Free State was cut off from the Commander-in-Chief he assumed command, in virtue of his seniority, over Rundle and Clements, and impressed on them the need of redoubling their vigilance on the line they were guarding. He also put himself into communication with Buller at Botha's Pass and

Measures taken by Kelly-Kenny and Roberts.

Hunter at Potchefstroom, and secured a promise of their co-operation in the north-east and north-west of the Free State if it should prove necessary. Besides this, he sent more troops and guns to Kroonstad and Winburg, strengthened the garrisons and posts on the line of communications as far as possible, and made urgent requests to General Forestier-Walker for reinforcements. The Commander-in-Chief himself also took vigorous action. On the 7th he sent Kitchener to put things in order along the railway, giving him the 19th Brigade (Smith-Dorrien), ten guns, and some M.I. wherewith to hold the posts. Methuen, who had remained at Lindley, had already been ordered on June 4, as soon as news of the convoy disaster reached Pretoria, to leave a brigade at Lindley, carry all the supplies he could spare to General Colvile, and then patrol the line. Methuen left General Paget with the 20th Brigade and the 38th Field Battery in Lindley, with the task of defending it, and also of carrying on negotiations which had been begun with Piet de Wet for surrender, and he himself arrived with the rest of his division at Heilbron on June 7, after he had had the usual fight near Vechtkop. On the 10th he met Kitchener with the Shropshires under Colonel Spens at Vredefort Road, and on the following day fought de Wet, who had taken up a position between his own farm Roodepoort and Honing Kopjes, and drove him off in a westerly direction. De Wet remained on the west of the line for three days, without, however, attacking Kroonstad, where he had a considerable chance of success, and recrossed the line on the 14th not far from the spot where he had captured the Derbys. In crossing he took the opportunity of attacking a construction train which happened to be standing there, and very nearly captured Lord Kitchener, who was camping close by. On this day communication with Pretoria was restored.

June 14. Communication restored.

But the explosion of Boer energy had not yet worked itself out, and the movement spread to the Boers south of Kroonstad. Those along the line who had been quietly cultivating their land since Lord Roberts's passage were beginning to be restless, arms were being brought out in

Ventersburg in spite of the proximity of British columns, and the Boers in the Doornberg under Roux made a sudden attack on the post guarding the Zand River bridge at Virginia Siding.* Lieut.-Colonel Capper, R.E., was in command here over a mixed force of the Royal Lancaster Militia, the Railway Pioneer Regiment, and a few M.I., in all amounting to about 730 men; an attack was expected, as information had been sent by a friendly farmer of a movement from the Doornberg, and the position held by the British force on both sides of the river had been well intrenched. Early on the morning of the 14th the Boers advanced on all sides, but chiefly under cover of dongas and scrub on the east and west, and began by wasting a good deal of energy in firing on some empty tents which had been left up by Colonel Capper when he shifted camp from his original position. They numbered about 800 altogether, and had two pom-poms and a field gun. But though their attack was facilitated by the excellent cover the ground gave them, they were finally driven off after some hours' fighting, their retreat being precipitated by the appearance of the 1st Oxfordshire L.I., two guns, and some Yeomanry sent to the garrison's rescue. The defence of this important post reflects great credit on Colonel Capper for his careful dispositions, and on the gallantry of the Militia battalion in their first action, and of the already proved R.P.R. The last regiment had to deplore the serious loss of its second in command and real originator, Major Seymour, the distinguished American mining engineer, whose death was most deeply felt by the whole Rand community.†

June 14. Attack by Boers from Doornberg on Virginia Siding post beaten off.

One more attack on the railway brings to an end the list

* A good deal of useful work was done both at this period and later on by Captain Pine Coffin, who was in charge of a squadron of Malta M.I., stationed on the railway between Bloemfontein and Kroonstad. Sometimes left in sole charge of posts along the line, sometimes under a superior commander, by his bold yet cautious use of his men in scouting and surprise expeditions, he acquired a great deal of valuable information as to the Boers' movements, and he rivalled them at their own game of unexpected captures by a small force of larger numbers. It was a Boer farmer whose confidence he had gained who at great personal risk gave information of the intended movement on Virginia Siding.

† See vol. i., p. 283, and vol. iii., p. 95.

of de Wet's exploits in this direction during the month. After recrossing the railway on the 14th, he had returned to the neighbourhood of Heilbron. After his escape Methuen had been policing the line and, in obedience to what cannot but be regarded as a most mistaken order from Lord Roberts, had burnt de Wet's own farm at Roodepoort. On the 19th Methuen was bringing in another convoy to Colvile, and when near the spot where the convoy of June 4 had been captured, was set upon by de Wet. During the fight Colvile's naval guns arrived from Heilbron to take the Boers in rear, whereupon de Wet was driven off. De Wet then retired south to Paardekraal, one of his favourite lairs, and was there joined by Commandant Olivier of Stormberg fame; thus reinforced, on the 22nd he organised another triple expedition against the railway. Serfontein was his most northern point of attack; here he cut the line himself; Froneman was equally successful at America siding only eight miles north of Kroonstad; but at Honingspruit, between those two places, Olivier was repulsed in two fights. The regular post was at Katbosch, just south of the station, where Captain Radcliffe had so carefully intrenched himself that in a fight lasting several hours he only had six casualties; at the station itself 400 newly-released prisoners under Colonel Bullock, who had been captured at Colenso, had just arrived from Pretoria by train; badly armed and in an absolutely exposed place, they kept up a most gallant fight against Olivier's lieutenant, Commandant Bosman, who had guns as well as the advantage of position,* until both forces were finally relieved by some guns and mounted men hastily sent from Kroonstad under Colonel Brookfield, a Yeomanry officer.

June 19. De Wet attacks convoy near Heilbron.

June 22. De Wet makes another triple attack on the railway.

In spite of some failures de Wet had been most successful in his raids. It is true they did no permanent injury to Lord Roberts's communications, but in raising the spirits of the republicans their effect can hardly be exaggerated. Previously the Free Staters had been thoroughly despondent, and the Transvaalers had all but made up their mind to give up the struggle after the capture of Pretoria. Now in both armies courage revived, and there was no longer talk of peace.

Inspiriting effect of de Wet's successes on the Boers.

* Colonel Bullock's casualties were 21.

LORD ROBERTS'S ADVANCE
Scale of Miles
50 40 30 20 10 0 50 100 150
GERMAN SOUTH WEST AFRICA
Walfish Bay
RHODESIA
Buluwayo
Carrington's 1st Brigade June 12
Mangwe
Victoria
Fort Tuli
Plumer Oct. 1899
Palapye
Pietersburg
TRANSVAAL
Nylstroom
Lydenburg
Mochudi
Jan.
Mar. 16
Zeerust
May 26
Rustenburg
14
JUNE 5
Middelburg
Balmoral
Barberton
May 15
Mafeking
15
Baden Powell
PRETORIA
Lichtenburg
June 2-8
JOHANNESBURG
July 6
Heidelberg
Bethal
Ermelo
SWAZI-LAND
June 1
Ventersdorp
Potchefstroom
June 14
Klerksdorp
Standerton
Amersfoort
Vryburg
Heilbron
Frankfort
Volksrust
June 12
June 18
Kuruman
Taungs
Vrede
Utrecht
Kroonstad
Lindley
Christiana
Newcastle
Vryheid
Fourteen Streams
Hoopstad
May 17
Daniels Kuil
Postmasburg
Harrismith
Dundee
May 26
Bethlehem
Senekal
Winburg
Barkly W.
Boshof
Apr. 4
ZULULAND
Campbell
Griquatown
Kimberley
Methuen
March
O. R. C.
Thaba Nchu
Ficksburg
May 24
Fabers Put
Douglas
BLOEMFONTEIN
Jacobsdal
Roberts
Hamilton
Apr. 29
Ladybrand
NATAL
Hopetown
Warren
Luckhoff
Fauresmith
Dewetsdorp
BASUTOLAND
Pieter-maritzburg
Orange River
Prieska
Edenburg
Wepener
Durban
Kuruman
Gordonia
Daniels Kuil
Postmasburg
Hay
Barkly
GRIQUALAND WEST
Upington
Kheis
Campbell
Griquatown
Kongas Pont
Dokiep
Kenhardt
Draghoonder
Hopetown
Orange River
Prieska
Houwater
Britstown
De Aar
Garnarvon
Victoria Rd.
CAPE C
Beaufort West
Tulbagh
Worcester
Cape Town

DISPOSITION OF FORCES

29th June 1900

Salisbury
Marandellas
Chimoio
Umtali
Bamboo Creek
Twenty Three Mile Peg
Beira
Victoria
Buluwayo
RHODESIA
Mangwe
Fort Tuli
PORTUGUESE EAST AFRICA
Komati Poort
Lorenzo Marques
Palapye
Kosi Bay
Pietersburg
Mochudi
TRANSVAAL
Nylstroom
Lydenburg
Komati Poort
Zeerust
Rustenburg
Baden Powell
Middelburg
Mafeking
PRETORIA
Balmoral
Barberton
Lorenzo Marques
Lichtenburg
JOHANNESBURG
Bethal
Ermelo
SWAZI-LAND
Heidelberg
Ventersdorp
Potchefstroom
Standerton
Kosi Bay
Klerksdorp
Vaal R.
Amersfoort
Hunter
Heilbron
Frankfort
Wynne
Volksrust
Macdonald
Coke
Vrede
Utrecht
Kroonstad
Methuen
Lindley
Lyttelton
Newcastle
Vryheid
Christiana
Paget
Hoopstad
Clements
Harrismith
Burn Murdoch
Dundee
Bethlehem
Senekal
Winburg
Downing
ZULULAND
Ladysmith
Boshof
O. R. C.
Ficksburg
BLOEMFONTEIN
Thaba'Nchu
NATAL
Jacobsdal
Ladybrand
Dewetsdorp
BASUTOLAND
Pieter-maritzburg
Durban
Fauresmith
Luckhoff
Edenburg
Wepener
Springfn
Smithfield
Bethulie
Colesberg
Aliwal North
Barkly East
Norvals Pont
Burghersdorp
Stormberg
Naauwpoort
Dordrecht
Rosmead
L O N Y
Reinet
Cradock
King Williamstown
East London
Grahamstown
Port Elizabeth

Scale of Miles.
50 40 30 20 10 0 50 100 150 200 250

DIRECTIONS
- Garrisons of 100 & under
- 100 - 500 troops
- 500 - 1000 "
- 1000 - 2000 troops
- 2000 & over (chiefly mobile columns)

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CHAPTER VIII

DIAMOND HILL

I

It will be sufficiently evident from the preceding chapters that Lord Roberts's difficulties were by no means at an end with his entry into Pretoria on June 5th. Peace indeed appeared to have settled over the west, but in the south and east of the Transvaal the enemy seemed unbroken. Methuen, Colvile, Rundle and Clements had their hands full in the Free State against de Wet and other leaders; Buller, though for the moment at rest, waiting for the answer to his suggestion that Christiaan Botha should surrender, still had a considerable force of Transvaalers before him on the Drakensberg; while only a few miles from Pretoria itself Louis Botha had gathered the main Transvaal army. There were also a large number of British prisoners in confinement at Waterval, twelve miles north of the victorious army.

Roberts's difficulties not ended with the capture of Pretoria.

One of Lord Roberts's first cares was to release the prisoners. The Boers had intended, on abandoning the capital, to take them away east, but had been so hurried at the last by Lord Roberts's rapid movements that they had only been able to carry off 1,000, leaving over 3,000 behind at Waterval. These were nearly all rank and file, for most of the officers, who had been confined in Pretoria, had overcome their guards on the morning of the 5th, and come out as free men to watch the march past Lord Roberts. On the 6th June Porter's brigade was ordered to effect the release of the men.

Release of prisoners at Waterval effected on June 6.

Starting from the cavalry camp north-west of Pretoria, Porter sent forward a squadron of the Greys under Captain

Maude to explore the ground. On reaching Onderste Poort, where the railway passes through a range of hills half-way between Wonderboom and Waterval, this squadron had a slight skirmish with some Boers posted there by De la Rey, who was preparing to resist the attempt at rescue with a force of 2,000 men and four guns on the ridges near Waterval. After putting to flight the Boer outposts, Maude advanced through the Poort to a place within sight of the camp, where he was met by a throng of prisoners who had overpowered the Boer guard on his appearance, and were surging tumultuously over the plain towards him. For a time both parties were hidden by a dip in the ground from De la Rey in the east, but as soon as the prisoners appeared on the sky-line, they were greeted with shells from the Boer guns. Maude promptly moved out to the right to cover them, three more squadrons were sent to the rescue by Porter, who had reached Onderste Poort, and the prisoners were brought down safely behind the Poort without further incident beyond one casualty and the shelling of the train which had been sent from Pretoria to pick them up. De la Rey seems to have been under the impression that he had the whole cavalry division before him, otherwise it is difficult to understand why he made no determined effort to cut off the few squadrons and the unarmed crowd who were trying to escape from him. That evening Porter rejoined French's other brigade and Hutton's M.I., who had all moved over from the north-west of Pretoria to Koedoespoort on the east.

Need of troops for lines of communication.

The accession of the 3,000 released prisoners, who were armed and formed into provisional battalions as rapidly as possible, was of considerable value to Lord Roberts at this moment; for the army of 25,000 men which had entered Pretoria was barely sufficient for the calls now made upon it. The first and most urgent need was the defence of the line of communications, which seemed seriously threatened by the fresh series of Boer successes in the Free State.* Within a few days of one another came the news of Colvile's straits at Heilbron, of Biddulphsberg, of the Lindley sur-

* See chap. vii.

render, of the captures of the Zwavelkranz convoy and of the 4th Derbys, and of the destruction of the railway at Rhenoster River; rumours also reached Lord Roberts of an intended attack on Vereeniging, and on the 10th he was informed that Kroonstad had fallen. He had to keep a considerable army at Pretoria, with Botha and the Transvaal army threatening him on the east and Buller too far away to create an effective diversion; at the same time he could not afford to run the risk of starvation if the solitary line at present in his possession were interrupted for long: so he sent south all the troops he could possibly spare.

Railway little damaged in the Transvaal.

Luckily the railway between the Vaal and Pretoria was undamaged except at the bridge over Six Mile Spruit near Irene, and enough rolling-stock had been captured * in the Transvaal to enable trains to run from Pretoria to Irene, and from Irene to Vereeniging. The only difficulty left to be overcome was the dearth of men to work the trains, as the Netherlands Railway servants refused both at Johannesburg and Pretoria to work for the invaders; but Colonel Girouard made a call for volunteers among reservists in the various battalions who had been railway men, engineers or fitters in England, and a very efficient staff was rapidly improvised.

June 6–8. Troops sent to guard the railway.

Thanks to Colonel Girouard's energy and presence of mind, Lord Roberts was able on the 6th to entrain Colonel Spens with the Shropshire Light Infantry and two guns of the 74th Battery from Irene to Vereeniging. On the following day Lord Kitchener was sent to organize the defence of the line of communication; the Shropshires with the two guns were moved across the Vaal, and their place at Vereeniging was taken by the 2nd South Wales Borderers and Nesbitt's Horse from Johannesburg; on the same day arrangements were made to garrison the railway between Vereeniging

* The list of captures was :—

	Engines.	Trucks.
At Germiston	8	200
Johannesburg	7	600
Pretoria	16	400

Some of the engines, however, were damaged, as the Boers had removed necessary parts.

and the Vaal by a column under the command of General Smith-Dorrien consisting of the three remaining battalions of his brigade (19th), the 1st Suffolks,* the 81st Battery and four guns of the 74th, Ross's Mounted Infantry Corps, and a company of the C.I.V.M.I. They were further reinforced on the 8th June by 900 released prisoners (Northumberland Fusiliers and Royal Irish Rifles), who were armed with captured Martini-Henry rifles.† These measures proved sufficient to prevent any irreparable damage to the lines of communication, but the situation continued to give considerable anxiety to Lord Roberts, as he was cut off from all direct communication with the Free State for the whole of his first week in Pretoria.

* The 1st Suffolks had been attached to the 23rd Brigade (W. G. Knox) when they first entered the Free State, but had been sent up to Kroonstad, when Lord Roberts arrived there. From May 20 until June 7 they had been attached to the 14th Brigade.

† The following were the positions of the troops on the lines of communication between Pretoria and the Vaal on the night of the 10th of June :—

Irene Station .	1,028 Mounted Infantry, two companies 2nd Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, 350 Northumberland Fusiliers (released prisoners).
Olifantsfontein .	One company 8th M.I., two companies 2nd Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.
Kaalfontein . .	One company 8th M.I., two companies 2nd Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.
Zuurfontein . .	One company 8th M.I., two companies 1st Suffolk Regiment.
Rietfontein . .	Two companies 1st Suffolk Regiment.
Elandsfontein .	Three companies 8th M.I., 1st Gordons, Royal Canadian Regiment, three companies 1st Suffolks, four guns 74th Field Battery, two companies East Lancashire Regiment.
Natal Spruit. .	Two companies 1st Suffolks.
Klip River . .	300 Royal Irish Rifles (released prisoners).
Vereeniging . .	Two companies South Wales Borderers, 250 Royal Irish Rifles (released prisoners), 70 Mounted Infantry, and two guns 81st Field Battery.

Lord Kitchener reached Taaibosch, in the Free State, on the 9th, and after leaving a garrison at that post moved further south on the 10th with the 2nd Battalion Shropshire Regiment, six companies South Wales Borderers, 200 Mounted Infantry, including Nesbitt's Horse, the 43rd and 44th Companies Imperial Yeomanry, two guns 74th Battery, and four guns of the 81st Battery.

Of the troops now left to him Lord Roberts kept the 14th Brigade and the remaining prisoners of war to garrison Pretoria, appointing General Tucker to command the garrison and General Maxwell governor of the town. The rest of his force was all moved on to the eastern flank, to hold Botha in check. By the 8th June Hamilton had the 21st Brigade at Garstfontein in the south-east, and his mounted troops, which now included Gordon's cavalry brigade as well as Broadwood's cavalry and Ridley's M.I. brigade, at Zwavelpoort further east. Pole-Carew was on the Delagoa railway at Silverton with the Eleventh Division and the heavy artillery, and French and Hutton had moved up from Koedoespoort to Kameeldrift; Henry's M.I. were spread over the country between French and Pole-Carew. Disposition of the other troops.

For a short time, indeed, it looked as if these precautions might be unnecessary, and as if Lord Roberts's rapid advance had earned its reward in the total submission of the Transvaal Boers. On the 5th Botha, after taking the greater part of his army through Pienaars Poort, called together a council of war at Hatherley, just west of the Poort. The meeting-place was the office of the whisky distillery belonging to Mr. Samuel Marks, a Russian Jew who, by his judicious investments and his wonderful business capacity, had acquired one of the largest fortunes in the Transvaal. Unlike many of the rich men who had made their money there, he was devoted to the country. By his financial aid he had assisted the early struggles of the Boer Commonwealth, and had long been a trusted adviser and friend of President Kruger. Among his numerous ventures there was none he cared for more than his model farm in the neighbourhood of Pienaars Poort, where all kinds of experiments in agriculture, fruit-growing and stock-raising were made, not only for his own benefit, but to the advantage of his fellow-citizens. But, attached as he was to the country, he cared little for its form of government. He was now convinced of the futility of further resistance by the Boers and anxious if possible to stop the devastation which he foresaw would result from Chance of peace. Influence of Mr. Samuel Marks.

a prolonged struggle. He therefore threw all his weight into the cause of peace, and considerably facilitated communications between the two sides by his influence with the Boers and English Uitlanders.

June 5. Meeting of Boer leaders at Hatherley distillery.

The company that awaited Botha in the office of the whisky distillery on the morning of the 5th June consisted of Generals De la Rey, Lemmer, Tobias Smuts, Fourie, Oosthuizen, Liebenberg and Lukas Meyer, of the Vice-President Schalk Burger, of Commandants Steenekamp of Rustenburg, Vermaas of Lichtenburg, Du Toit, Buys of Heidelberg, Tollie de Beer of Bloemhof, Vosler from Cape Colony, Colonel Trichardt and Major Wolmarans of the artillery, and a few others. A deep gloom seemed to weigh on the assembly, which was not dispelled when Botha came in with a heavy shadow on his usually confident and open countenance. The discussion was opened with a prayer, and then speeches were made by De la Rey, Lemmer, and Tobias Smuts; all complained bitterly of the want of support given them by a government which had retired to safety with millions in gold, while the men on commando had not the money to buy the food and forage refused to them on the farms: they added that their men were done up and were returning home in crowds. De la Rey even threatened that if the government would not support them better, he should retire with his faithful burghers of Rustenburg, Marico, and Lichtenburg, and set up an independent republic in the west. Botha began his speech in reply to their complaints by a lame defence of the government and a promise of better treatment for the burghers in the future, but ended up by declaring that if the spirit of the burghers was as it had been represented by three generals of such undoubted courage and patriotism, the only thing left to them was to surrender their country to England. Such a declaration from the leader who had hitherto shown most boldness and ability against the English, confirmed the almost universal sense of hopelessness in continuing the struggle, and there is little doubt that a vote taken then would have been in favour of peace. Schalk Burger, however, and Vosler pleaded passionately for delay, and it was finally agreed that a

Their despondent tone.

definite decision should be put off to a further council two days later.*

Roberts proposes a meeting.

Lord Roberts was not long kept in ignorance of this weakening of the Boer resistance. To Hutton's scouts, who penetrated the Boer lines, some of their outposts openly expressed their desire for peace; and on the 7th June Mr. Marks's manager, Mr. Crawford, came to inform Lord Roberts that General Botha was anxious for a meeting. This information was confirmed on the following day by Mrs. Botha, who was allowed to go out from Pretoria to see her husband; whereupon Lord Roberts immediately wrote proposing that he and Botha should meet at Mr. Marks's house at Zwartkopjes. But meanwhile a change had come over the spirit of the Boer councils.

At second council news of de Wet's successes revive their spirits.

Just before the time appointed for the second council, news had arrived of de Wet's successes on the railway line, which included the capture of 700 prisoners and of large stores of war material, and the interruption of Lord Roberts's communications. Whether, even without this news, the Transvaal Boers would really have surrendered is doubtful; their momentary feelings of depression after a disaster were always followed by the revival of their natural love of freedom and of their unquenchable hope that by some lucky turn they might stave off submission. But undoubtedly on this, as on the next occasion when peace seemed within reach, the determining cause for its rejection was the unbending attitude of the Free State Boers. At the adjourned council there was no more talk of peace; the chief incidents were a fiery speech by a young field-cornet from Boksburg, Hendrik Beyers, who then first came into notice, in which he reproached some of the older commanders for their cowardice and incapacity, the passing of a self-denying resolution by which councils of war were for the future abolished, and the sole responsibility for decisions left with the commandant-general, and an announcement by Botha

No more idea of peace.

* There was also in Pretoria an active party of surrendered officials like de Souza who naturally did all they could to persuade their compatriots to follow the same course as they had themselves; but their interference, which was resented by the Boers in the field, probably had a contrary effect to their intentions.

that he intended to give battle to Lord Roberts on the spot. Botha himself, whose military capacity would enable him to see more clearly than his compatriots the small effect of de Wet's present successes on the final issue, coquetted for a few days longer with Lord Roberts's proposals. He even went so far as to receive three surrendered Boers as emissaries from Pretoria on the second day of Diamond Hill, and up to the 15th carried on negotiations with Lord Roberts, which were finally broken off only on the excuse that the armistice offered was not sufficiently comprehensive. But it must have been evident to Botha after the two councils of war that, whatever the government might do, influential leaders like De la Rey would not give in, so that a real peace was out of the question. It seems, therefore, probable that in the negotiations subsequent to the 8th June he was only temporizing to find out the extent of Lord Roberts's concessions.

Roberts negotiates, but prepares for attack.

On his side Lord Roberts, although continuing the correspondence with General Botha for a week after the 8th, did not, like General Buller, leave the Boers unmolested during that time.

II

Description of country east of Pretoria.

East of Pretoria the country for 150 miles has, broadly, the same rolling outlines and the same bracing climate as the Free State; the veld never sinking much below an altitude of 4,000 feet, and the ridges and kopjes reproducing the same soft contours and curves as the plain from which they rise. At Waterval Boven this country suddenly ceases; within four miles the railway here plunges down a depth of 900 feet into the semi-tropical low veld which extends for the remaining 200 miles to Delagoa Bay. There are still mountains here, but they are steep, with clear-cut edges and deep precipices which descend into the steamy and fever-stricken valleys of the Sabi, Crocodile, and Komati rivers. In some of these valleys there are forests where lions, elephants, rhinoceroses and giraffes make their home, in others the luxuriant vegetation attracts the farmers with

their flocks and herds from the high veld during the winter cold. Again, north of the Magaliesberg, all over the Transvaal the country assumes much the same characteristics of warm, low-lying valleys and more pronounced hills, though it is only east of Waterval Boven that the semi-tropical belt begins.

The Transvaal Government was now at Machadodorp, on the edge of the high veld, transacting its business and guarding its gold in railway carriages which were ready at a moment's notice for further retreat towards Komati Poort. The prisoners hurried off from Waterval and those sent up by de Wet from the Free State were confined at Nooitgedacht, in the low country. Lydenburg and Barberton, north and south of the line respectively, towns only approachable from the west by tortuous and precipitous paths over the formidable mountain barriers which surrounded them, were stored with large reserves of arms and food supplies.

The Transvaal Government at Machadodorp.

The position to which Botha had retreated sixteen miles from Pretoria was admirably adapted not only to defend the railway and the approach to the remaining Boer strongholds on the east, but also for a counter attack on Pretoria. With his centre on the railway at Pienaars Poort he commanded the Donkerhoek and Diamond Hill ridge, which curves away from the poort to Bronkhorst Spruit on the south-east and north of the line and loses itself in a maze of scrub-covered hills and valleys. Between Pienaars Poort and Pretoria, the Tigerpoort ridge starts from Koedoespoort and curves round also to Bronkhorst Spruit, which it reaches about ten miles south of the Donkerhoek—Diamond Hill range; and nearer in still to Pretoria a third ridge starts south from Klapperkop Fort, and takes a bend to the south-east near Bapsfontein. All three ridges are connected with one another by lateral spurs, whereby a great advantage, which Botha was not slow to seize, accrued to the defenders of the Donkerhoek chain. From Pretoria, the natural approaches to this chain are only three, one by the upper Middelburg road through Franspoort, the second in the track of the railway through Pienaars Poort, and the third by the lower Middelburg road through Donker-

Botha's position on the Donkerhoek ridge.

poort, and all three are strongly defended by kopjes on each side.

Distribution of his force.

Botha's army, in spite of the accessions to his strength from Natal and the west,* numbered only 6,000 men. Yet with this small force, when he saw Ian Hamilton at Zwavelpoort, in the Tigerpoort range, and French at Kameeldrift threatening his flanks, he determined to occupy a line thirty miles long from Boekenhoutskloof on the north to Morskop on the south. This only allowed an average of one man for each eight and a half yards of ground, without any provision at all for a reserve. The Boer leaders, indeed, very rarely kept a reserve in their battles, preferring to have all their men in the firing-line, and trusting to their ability to relieve a hardly-pressed detachment by bringing up men from a less exposed quarter. But Botha made up for his want of numbers by the skill of his tactical dispositions, in which moreover, he was aided by the great natural strength of the ground chosen. He had thoroughly taken to heart his error at the Zand River in massing too many men in the centre, and in leaving his right flank too weak and too little extended; for his few weeks' experience against Lord Roberts had enabled him to master the Field-Marshal's almost invariable method of attack, which was to hold back his centre until his opponents' flanks had been turned. Botha, therefore, little apprehensive for his centre, which extended roughly between the upper and lower Middelburg roads from Edendale to Donkerpoort, placed there the weakest of the three divisions into which his force was divided. This division consisted of the Middelburg and Lydenburg and part of the Carolina commandos with the Police, under Generals Lemmer and Tobias Smuts. There were also here a Long Tom (6-inch) under Major Wolmarans, placed on a railway truck behind Pienaars Poort,† eight field guns, and some pom-poms under Captains de Jager and Pretorius. The wings on the other hand

* See chap. v., p. 188, and chap. vi., p. 224.

† On the 10th June, while the Eleventh Division were in camp at Silverton, the Long Tom was brought out on the railway through Pienaars Poort and fired some shells at them. The English 5-inch guns, however, drove it back after a shell had torn up the line just in front of the truck on which the Long Tom was placed.

were extended so far to the north and south, and were relatively so strong, that Botha hoped to circumvent French's and Ian Hamilton's flank attacks and break in upon the English centre, which he expected to find weak. On the right flank De la Rey, with Snyman under him, had a strong force drawn from the western commandos of Rustenburg, Marico, Krugersdorp, Lichtenburg, and Potchefstroom, together with a few foreigners, and ten guns and some pom-poms under Von Dalwig; they were chiefly lining the Kameelfontein ridges, which command the upper Middelburg road, with detachments thrown out north as far as Boekenhoutskloof, and south as far as Edendale. The left flank extended from Donkerpoort along the Diamond Hill plateau as far as Morskop, and after Roberts had shown his hand by allowing Ian Hamilton to appear at Zwavelpoort, strong advance parties were pushed forward to Tigerpoort on the next range and to Kleinfontein, a low hill in front of Diamond Hill. General Fourie was here in command, but Botha himself gave particular attention to the operations on this side. Viljoen and his Johannesburgers were placed at Donkerpoort, the Boksburg commando and detachments from Ermelo and Bethal lined the Diamond Hill plateau, Kleinfontein, and Morskop, and Buys,* with 500 Heidelbergers, and some Germans under Kuntze were holding Tigerpoort and the ridge connecting Tigerpoort with Morskop. The artillery of the left flank was in command of Captain von Lossberg,† who posted his 12-pounder Armstrong near Tigerpoort, and distributed his three Krupps and two pom-poms under Lieutenant Thuysma between Kleinfontein, Diamond Hill, and Morskop. The advantage of these dispositions on the left flank was that Ian Hamilton's force, on coming through Zwavelpoort into

* Commandant Weilbach had been superseded in the command of the Heidelberg commando, as he was thought not to have shown sufficient tenacity in holding his position near Irene on the 4th June; see also vol. iii., p. 172.

† Captain von Lossberg was a German volunteer who first joined the Free State Artillery at Sannah's Post. After a difference with Christiaan de Wet he went up to the Transvaal, where he was given command of a battery. He is one of the few volunteers who returned for the guerilla fighting in the second part of the war. He published an interesting book on his experiences.

the Pienaars River valley, would be taken between the cross-fire of the detachments on Kleinfontein and Diamond Hill and of the Heidelbergers on the ridges running up to Tigerpoort.

Roberts's plan of attack.

Lord Roberts's dispositions for attack were exactly those anticipated by his opponent. On June 10 he called Generals French, Ian Hamilton, Pole-Carew, Broadwood, and Gordon into Pretoria to give them his instructions. French, on the left flank, was to march with the 1st and 4th Cavalry Brigades and Hutton's 1st and 3rd Corps M.I. from Kameeldrift, turn the Boer flank about Kameelfontein, and come down on the railway near Witfontein; on the right flank Hamilton was to turn the Boer left flank with Broadwood's brigade, use Gordon to protect his own right rear, and attack Diamond Hill with his infantry and mounted infantry. In the centre Pole-Carew was to advance some miles east of Silverton, but only to demonstrate with his heavy artillery, and not to attempt a frontal attack until the flank attacks had developed; and Henry's M.I. corps, with "J" Battery, was to keep up communications between French and the centre.

Comparison of the two opposing forces.

At first sight it would appear as if Lord Roberts, with three infantry brigades, four cavalry brigades, and seven corps of mounted infantry, besides eleven batteries, some pom-poms, and six heavy guns, was in overwhelming force against Botha's 6,000 men, 22 field guns, and one Long Tom. But the actual numbers by no means corresponded to the strength which such units should have represented. French's cavalry especially had suffered such loss in horses that regiments were reduced to the size of squadrons, and squadrons to troops, while his batteries could only horse four guns instead of six; altogether his two brigades and Hutton's mounted infantry, instead of numbering 3,500, could muster barely 1,400 men. Broadwood's cavalry, owing to Ian Hamilton's care of the horses, numbered 700, as much as French's two brigades together, but Bruce Hamilton's infantry was reduced to 2,200. Thus Lord Roberts's army engaged at Diamond Hill numbered at the most 14,000 men with 6 heavy guns, 64 field guns, and some

pom-poms.* Although this army was double Botha's, it was not a large one to attack the strong position held by the Boers.

June 11. The battle begins.

On the 11th June Lord Roberts came out from Pretoria and established his headquarters on some rising ground six miles west of Pienaars Poort, whence he had a good view of the Boer right and centre. A little to the east Pole-Carew drew up his division, and shelled the Boer centre with Captain Bearcroft's two naval 4·7 guns and Colonel Foster's two 5-inch guns; but, in accordance with his instructions, he played only a waiting rôle all day.

Ian Hamilton's operations on the right flank.

On the right, Ian Hamilton's intention had been that Broadwood should make a dash through the gap between Diamond Hill and Morskop towards the railway, while Gordon protected his right flank and Ridley his left, and the infantry helped to ease the pressure by an attack on Diamond Hill. But his force was not strong enough and Botha's too advantageously placed for the manœuvre to be carried out as planned. Gordon, on coming through Zwavelpoort, turned southwards to dislodge the Boers from Tigerpoort, but found them too strong for him, and was held there for some hours, while his battery ("R") and Von Lossberg's Armstrong had an ineffective duel.† In consequence of this Broadwood's right flank was unprotected, so that Ian Hamilton was obliged to divert the advance-guard of his infantry brigade, consisting of the Derbys, two guns of the 76th Battery and a company of the C.I.V.M.I., and subsequently Bainbridge's mounted infantry corps, to watch Tigerpoort and set Gordon free.

Gordon, on being released, hurried after Broadwood, who had been advancing eastwards along the Pienaars valley.

* The force was distributed as follows:—

On the left flank (French).	In the centre (Pole-Carew and Henry).	On the right flank (Ian Hamilton).
1,400 mounted men.	6,000 infantry.	2,200 infantry.
12 field guns.	400 mounted men.	3,000 mounted men.
	22 field guns.	28 field guns.
	4 heavy guns.	2 heavy guns.
	2 naval 12-pdrs.	

† "R" Battery fired 108 rounds and wounded one Boer artilleryman.

While following up Broadwood a squadron of the 17th Lancers came unexpectedly under a heavy fire at close range from some Germans on Klipkop; and before cover could be regained the squadron commander, Major Fortescue, and his subaltern, Lieutenant Cavendish, were killed. But though hard pressed, Gordon succeeded in holding the ridges on Tweedragt, south of Broadwood. Ridley, with the 2nd, 5th and 6th Corps M.I., was also advancing across the Pienaars River in a north-easterly direction, so as to cover Broadwood's left flank. Legge's corps was left to hold the Boers thrown forward on Kleinfontein Hill, while De Lisle's and Dawson's corps went on towards the main Diamond Hill plateau.

Broadwood attacked on his left flank

Broadwood, meanwhile, was advancing rapidly along the centre of the broad valley of Pienaar's River west of Morskop. As he crossed the river he was exposed to shell-fire from a Krupp on the Kleinfontein ridge, and to rifle-fire from the south; but, without a halt, he hastened on, as he could see that Fourie was thinning the line in front of him to reinforce the resistance to Gordon and Ridley on the flanks. Leaving two guns of "Q" Battery with the 10th Hussars in rear, he took on the two remaining guns,* the Household Cavalry, and the 12th Lancers to a rise about 5,000 yards from the gap between Morskop and Diamond Hill. On arriving there, one of Von Lossberg's guns, under escort, was seen changing ground near Morskop. Phipps Hornby's two guns were sent forward to attack it, but had hardly fired a round when a sharp rifle-fire was opened on them from the north at a range of 300 yards, and the Lancer outposts were seen hurriedly moving in towards the guns. This fire came from some Boers of the Boksburg commando, who were sent down from Diamond Hill to take Broadwood in flank. Without a moment's hesitation, Lieutenant Conolly, in charge of the section, turned his guns on them and dispersed them, after firing about eight rounds of case shot. Meanwhile Lord Airlie, under Broadwood's orders, had rallied his Lancers, then charged in close order, and completed the rout of this plucky band of Boers, who had three killed and fourteen wounded with the lance. Just at this point the see-saw of

* Two of the guns had been left behind in Pretoria for want of horses.

battle again changed. Fourie, seeing that his men were hard pressed, had sent down a party of Germans under Von Goeben to support them. Reaching the shelter of some rocks not 800 yards from the guns, they suddenly opened fire at point-blank range on the Lancers as they came up, still at the charge. Lord Airlie, a gallant cavalry leader, saw in a moment that charging Lancers could do nothing against sheltered rifle-fire; he gave the order "Troops, right about wheel," and almost at the words was struck by a bullet and fell dead. The Lancers turned back, losing two other officers and some men in their retirement, but the Germans were stopped from further advance by the fire which was concentrated upon them by the guns and gun escort.

and on his right flank.

This attack on Broadwood's left flank had barely been driven off when his right flank was threatened. Some of Buys's men, disengaging themselves from Gordon, came along the southern ridges to some kraals and a detached kopje, whence they crept up under shelter of some mealie-fields, and began pouring an enfilading fire on the guns. Broadwood immediately turned to Colonel Calley, who was in command of the Household Cavalry, and ordered him to charge with two squadrons and clear the right flank. The horses, worn with long marches and insufficient food, had not much spirit left in them, but the Household troops, with swords drawn and shouts of exultation, urged them to the fastest pace possible across the mealie-fields, the Boers dropping down into the corn and firing at them as they passed. After charging for about a mile, the squadrons were divided, Calley taking the 1st Life Guards up to the kraals and sending Lord Sudley with the Blues to the kopje. The Boers were driven out of both positions, but the horses were too exhausted to pursue, and only one prisoner was taken, while the cavalry had twenty-one horses hit and one man mortally wounded.

Broadwood holds his ground.

Broadwood was now freed from attacks at close quarters, but he was quite unable to advance any further, as the ground between him and the gap beyond was so boggy that, if he had ventured on it, the Boers would have had him at their mercy. He even had some difficulty in maintaining himself on his ridge, being exposed to fire from Diamond Hill on

the left, from Morskop in front, and from Tweedragt and Kleinzonderhout on the right. However, after bringing up the Hussars and the other two guns of "Q" Battery from the rear, and putting the two sections of the battery trail to trail, he held his ground until he was made comparatively secure by the reinforcement of De Lisle's M.I. and "P" Battery sent down to him by Ridley.

Ian Hamilton's infantry under Bruce Hamilton ordered to attack Kleinfontein.

Bruce Hamilton had set out from Garstfontein before dawn, and at 9 o'clock he came through Zwavelpoort with the main body of his brigade. His advance-guard had already been diverted to Tigerpoort; now he was ordered to leave part of the Camerons to hold the Tigerpoort ridge, and the rest of them with Massie's two 5-inch guns on a ridge further east. He then marched across the Pienaars River with the Sussex, C.I.V., Lovat's Scouts, the 82nd Battery and four guns of the 76th, to Boschkop Farm, whence the Boers could be seen at Kleinfontein and on Diamond Hill, 2,500 yards beyond. Ian Hamilton's original orders were that he should not take his infantry beyond this point, as Lord Roberts was anxious to avoid any frontal attack before the cavalry were behind the Boers. But, seeing Broadwood's uncomfortable predicament, Ian Hamilton determined to relieve the pressure on him by sending Bruce Hamilton to attack the Boers on Kleinfontein, where Legge's M.I. had been checked after securing a footing on the edge of the ridge.

Bruce Hamilton drives Boers off Kleinfontein.

On receiving his orders, Bruce Hamilton sent forward Lovat's Scouts to explore the ground between Boschkop and Kleinfontein, and behind them in open order the Sussex on the left and the C.I.V. on the right. The attack was supported by the two field batteries on each flank and by the two 5-inch guns in the rear. The Boers, who were not numerous on Kleinfontein, did not seriously contest the possession of the ridge, but on the approach of the infantry, retired to their main position on Diamond Hill. At the moment it looked as if a further advance on Diamond Hill would be successful, as the Boers had retired in some confusion; but, when Ian Hamilton was about to order it, a message came from Lord Roberts that he was to fall back without committing his infantry further until he could be

reinforced. Accordingly, outposts of the infantry and Legge's M.I. were left to hold the captured ridge, and the rest of Bruce Hamilton's force began to withdraw to Boschkop. A little later Lord Roberts, who had then noticed the confusion of the Boers, sent another message telling Ian Hamilton to pursue his advantage. But it was then too late; the infantry were too far back to be recalled, and the Boers were already settling down in strength on Diamond Hill.

Then retires to Boschkop.

On their right flank the Boers, who had not seriously suffered either in the centre or the left, were more than holding their own against French. Starting before sunrise from Kameeldrift in a north-easterly direction, French had crossed the Pienaar's River and its tributary, the Kameelspruit, without opposition; he then found himself at the mouth of the broad Kameelfontein valley which rises gradually eastwards for about four miles to a rocky ridge thickly overgrown with scrub and thorn bushes; on the north the valley is commanded by the Boekenhoutskloof line of hills and four miles across on the south by those on Kameelfontein. On all three sides of the valley De la Rey had posted men in wait for French. At first the track skirts the Kameelfontein hills and is under cover, but about a mile from the drift, the 4th Brigade, leading, was stopped by a fusilade which seemed to be coming from the north-east, though it was impossible to fix the spot exactly, owing to the excellent cover afforded to the Boers by the rocks and dense vegetation. For a few moments the cavalry were thrown into some confusion, a staff officer's horse was shot dead, and Major Hathaway received a bullet in the abdomen; but French, who was up in front, promptly ordered the men to dismount and fire, a section of "O" Battery and a pom-pom came into action, and a galloper was despatched to bring up General Hutton's mounted infantry. The shrapnel of Sir J. Jervis's guns soon began to tell, and the Boer fire slackened for a time. French then ordered Dickson to obtain a footing on the Kameelfontein hills, which commanded his right flank, supporting him with Alderson's corps of mounted infantry. Before Dickson's advance the Boers gradually fell back along the ridge to a kopje on the east. Here they

French on the right flank is stopped by De la Rey.

took their stand, and for the rest of the day exchanged rifle-fire with Dickson's men, who were under good cover of scrub and boulders only 600 yards off. To Dickson's right rear Alderson's men, in equally good cover, prevented any attempt of the Boers to overlap French. While Dickson was advancing along Kameelfontein, a party of 300 or 400 mounted Boers under Snyman could be seen streaming along the Boekenhoutskloof ridge to the left. Porter's brigade, with Pilcher's mounted infantry and "G" Battery in reserve, was at once sent up to forestall them. Porter occupied the western end of the ridge just in time, and though held in his position all day, he prevented Snyman from enveloping the left flank. "O" Battery and an escort of cavalry were kept in the plain, and though in a somewhat exposed position, did good work in keeping down De la Rey's gun-fire, and had only six casualties.

French's awkward position.

French was in an awkward position. So far from riding round the Boer flank, his cavalry were reduced to infantry work in defensive positions; he had no reserve of ammunition, as his wagons had all been sent to the Eleventh Division; and by midday even his retreat was threatened, for a long-range gun at Edendale began shelling the drift immediately behind him, and a party of Boers had crept forward from Beynespoort to the drift further west over the Pienaars River. Accordingly, early in the afternoon he sent Captain Brinton of the Life Guards with a small escort to inform Lord Roberts that he would probably be unable to effect the turning movement in face of the strong opposition. The escort was shot down at the drift, and Captain Brinton had great difficulty in carrying the message through. Lord Roberts's answer was that French was to withdraw if he found the enemy too strong, and above all, not to risk too many casualties. French, however, determined to stay where he was for the night. He counted on the dislike generally shown by the Boers to leave cover even when the chances of a counter attack were greatly in their favour; and though his own men could not advance, they were so well protected behind rocks and improvised sangars that his total casualties for the day had been only two officers and twelve men wounded. Besides, he was anxious to assist Lord Roberts's plans for

the following day by holding as many Boers as possible in front of him. He therefore ordered his men to bivouac in their sangars, and sent a message to Colonel Henry asking him to send up his ammunition under escort by the upper Middelburg road.

State of affairs at nightfall on June 11.

When Lord Roberts returned to Pretoria at nightfall the position on the battlefield was anything but reassuring. The projected flank attacks had entirely failed, and both French and Broadwood were almost surrounded. The only successes won so far were the capture of the Kleinfontein ridge and the clearing of Tigerpoort by Ian Hamilton; but in their main position the Boers were still untouched. In the evening Lord Roberts received news that Lord Methuen had scattered de Wet's forces near Rhenoster River,* so that his mind was made easier about the state of the communications. Nevertheless, he appears at first to have felt some hesitation about continuing the operations east of Pretoria. As Botha's flanks could not be turned, the only course left open seemed to be a frontal attack on some part of the main position, and Lord Roberts was not persuaded that the benefit of such an attack would compensate for the losses it would entail. This doubt is reflected in the first message sent to Pole-Carew that night, in which he told him that if Ian Hamilton and Broadwood felt confident that they could get in rear of the enemy without serious loss, he thought the operations might be continued, but that Pole-Carew was not to move from the centre for fear of leaving the road to Pretoria open. However, as later reports came in, from which it appeared probable that Ian Hamilton, if supported, could pierce the Boer left centre at Diamond Hill, he changed his mind and determined to make a vigorous attack at that point. At 3.15 A.M. he sent out a second message to Pole-Carew with final orders for the morning. He was still to keep a brigade and some heavy guns in the centre, and, if he found it feasible, to bring down some of Henry's mounted infantry south of the railway; but with his other brigade and some guns, he was to prolong his line to the right and support Hamilton's attack on Diamond Hill.

Roberts decides on a frontal attack.

* See chap. vii., p. 266.

Previously a message had been sent to Hamilton authorising the attack and promising assistance from Pole-Carew.

The Boers relieve the pressure on Ian Hamilton's right flank.

On the night of the 11th, Ian Hamilton found that the pressure on his right flank was being relaxed. Parties of the Heidelberg commando slipped away round to the main position, and some of Fourie's wing, including a portion of Von Lossberg's artillery, left the main ridge altogether in order to take up a defensive position further west along the railway. Ian Hamilton was therefore able to bring up the Derbys and the C.I.V.M.I. to bivouac with their brigade at Boschkop. The Cameron Highlanders and Bainbridge's mounted infantry remained where they were to guard the baggage, and to prevent a renewed attack from Tigerpoort. Gordon, Broadwood, De Lisle and Dawson were still well forward in the Pienaars River valley. The Kleinfontein ridge was held without difficulty by the infantry outposts and Legge's M.I.

The Diamond Hill position.

The western face of the Diamond Hill plateau is a steep cliff scored with dongas which rises from the valley beyond Kleinfontein; from the edge of this cliff the ground mounts gently for half a mile to the line of boulders which marks the true crest and then descends abruptly into a valley to the east. From north-west to south-east the plateau is six miles long and is marked by three undulations, of which the first forms the southern flank of Donkerpoort, the central one is the true Diamond Hill, while the third at Rhenosterfontein has almost the appearance of an isolated kopje as it descends into the plain which separates it from Morskop.

June 12. Fourie's dispositions.

On the morning of the 12th, Fourie had lined the western edge of the plateau with riflemen, who commanded the approach from Kleinfontein. Guns and pom-poms were placed on Morskop, on the Rhenosterfontein hill, and on a hill flanking the northern side of Donkerpoort. These guns commanded the eastern Kleinfontein slopes, and could also sweep the Diamond Hill plateau. If this lower crest had to be abandoned by the riflemen, the Boers still had a line of retreat to the real crest, and to the ridges further east separated by deep valleys from Diamond Hill. The position may be compared to the segment of a circle, of which the

Diamond Hill plateau formed the chord, and the ridges beyond the arc. Both the chord and the arc were held by the Boers, while their detached strongholds at Morskop and on the north of Donkerpoort enabled them to enfilade an enemy advancing from the west.

Ian Hamilton's preparations for attack.

Ian Hamilton first sent forward the C.I.V.M.I. under Colonel Cholmondeley, supported by the 82nd Battery, to explore the ground on the south-east of Kleinfontein. On advancing beyond the ridge they were stopped by shell-fire from Rhenosterfontein; half a battalion of the Derbys, who were sent up to reinforce them, also came under heavy fire, but succeeded in gaining a position 1,000 yards from the plateau.

Meanwhile the rest of the brigade had been brought under shelter of Kleinfontein, where the final dispositions for the attack were made. The infantry attack was to be directed on the four miles of plateau immediately south of Donkerpoort; De Lisle's M.I. were ordered to advance up to the foot of Rhenosterfontein and secure that part of the plateau, while Legge went forward in his support; Broadwood and Gordon held the extreme right flank in their positions of the preceding day.

Support arrives from Pole-Carew.

Before definitely committing himself to the attack, Ian Hamilton had been ordered to wait for support from Pole-Carew. His infantry were ready before this support had appeared, but just as Ian Hamilton had made up his mind to wait no longer, he saw the Guards' Brigade appearing, and sent off an aide-de-camp to ask for a battalion to reinforce his line.

The reason for the delay was that General Pole-Carew had not received Lord Roberts's second message sent off at 3.15 A.M. till nearly 8 o'clock. As soon as it arrived he ordered the Guards' Brigade to march towards Ian Hamilton with the 83rd Battery, the naval 12-pounders, and the two 5-inch guns. The 18th Brigade and the rest of his artillery were left to hold the centre. After a march of four miles the 5-inch guns, with the Scots Guards as escort, were halted at a ridge on the left bank of the Pienaar's River within range of the main Diamond Hill plateau. The other battalions and guns

marched on towards the northern edge of Kleinfontein, but made slow progress owing to the boggy nature of the ground to be traversed. As soon as Ian Hamilton's message reached the column, the 1st Coldstream Guards were sent off to join Bruce Hamilton's brigade, while the 2nd Coldstream Guards and the 3rd Grenadier Guards took ground to the left opposite the northern edge of Diamond Hill.

Infantry attack on Diamond Hill.

The attack on Diamond Hill began shortly after midday. The battalions advanced into the valley in widely-extended order; the half battalion of the Derbyshire Regiment on the right of the firing line, then the C.I.V., and the Sussex on the left. The second half battalion of the Derbyshire Regiment and the 1st Coldstream Guards were in support on the right, and the 2nd Coldstream Guards were ordered to come up in échelon on the left when the Sussex Regiment had gained the crest. Before reaching the valley the infantry were at first exposed to a hot fire from the Boer guns and from the riflemen on the edge of the plateau, but the 76th and 82nd Batteries and Massie's 5-inch guns east of Kleinfontein and the 83rd Battery and naval 12-pounders on the west played with so much effect on the edge of the plateau and on the guns that the Boer aim was very bad. Down in the valley and in scrambling up the western face the infantry were under good cover, and on reaching what appeared from below to be the crest they found that the magnificent support which the artillery gave them had driven the Boers away. But here the full difficulty of the task first appeared. The Boers had retired only half a mile back to the true crest, and in perfect security were pouring a hail of bullets on to the infantry as they climbed over the edge; at the same time the Boer guns from Donkerpoort, Morskop, and Rhenosterfontein turned all their fire on the plateau. The English guns below could no longer reach the Boer riflemen, and without guns it was impossible to advance against their fire. Bruce Hamilton thereupon ordered up the 82nd Battery into the firing line. Major Connolly in command responded quickly to the call, and brought his battery up a rough track which crosses Diamond Hill to a spot between the C.I.V. and the Sussex Regiment. There was little cover for the guns, and as they were un-

limbering the full violence of the Boer fire seemed to be turned upon them. But as soon as they came into action the effect was felt, and it was not long before they had subdued the Boer fire to such an extent that the C.I.V. were able to rush the crest of Diamond Hill, and the Sussex Regiment, followed shortly afterwards by the 2nd Coldstream Guards, cleared the crest further north.

Boers retire to a strong position further east.

The Boers, however, were not yet beaten. Though forced to give up most of the plateau, they had retired to an equally strong position on the arc of ridges to the east; the deep valley made it impossible to follow them from Diamond Hill, although a section of the 83rd Battery, brought up into an exposed position on the crest between the 2nd Coldstream Guards and the Sussex Regiment, did good work in keeping down their fire. On the right the 1st Derbyshire Regiment and 1st Coldstream Guards, now facing towards the Rhenosterfontein crest, could make no headway in that direction.

Such was the position of Lord Roberts's right flank about 4.30 in the afternoon; it was not unlike a stale-mate in chess.

De la Rey proposes an attack on Roberts's centre.

On his left flank the situation was still more favourable to the Boers. The morning found both sides occupying the same ground as the night before, and the firing at close range was resumed. About 9 o'clock an attempt by Snyman to envelop Porter by occupying the ridges north of him was frustrated by a detachment of Pilcher's mounted infantry. Then De la Rey moved up his guns from Edendale, and shelled the western ridge of Kameelfontein and Porter's bivouac beneath Boekenhoutskloof. By the afternoon his firing line had been reinforced; he had thirteen guns in action against French, and he felt that the moment had come to strike. He therefore sent a message to Botha asking for a reinforcement which would enable him to overpower French, charge down on Lord Roberts's weak centre, cut it up, and then turn on Ian Hamilton. Botha received this message about 4 o'clock and immediately ordered Tobias Smuts to detach some of his men from the centre to reinforce De la Rey.

They were just starting when another message came from

But this move is stopped on news of the capture of Rhenosterfontein position by De Lisle.

Fourie to say that the Rhenosterfontein kopje had been captured and that Ian Hamilton now held the whole of the Diamond Hill plateau. Botha at once countermanded the despatch of the reinforcement to De la Rey.

De Lisle, it will be remembered, had been sent to the foot of the kopje in the morning, and about noon he opened the attack by bringing his two pom-poms, worked by Major Crampton and Captain C. Stirling, into action behind some trees, 2,000 yards from the kopje, at the same time ordering the 6th M.I. Battalion to dismount and work up to Rhenosterfontein Farm close under the hill. The New South Wales Mounted Rifles were to support the 6th M.I. Battalion, while the 1st West Australian M.I. were held in reserve. About 2 P.M. the advance began under cover of the pom-pom fire which was directed on the Boer gun. As soon as De Lisle saw that the Battalion had gained a footing on the hill, he brought the pom-poms under shelter of the wall of Rhenosterfontein Farm at a range of 1,400 yards, and let go the New South Wales Mounted Rifles. Leaving their horses under cover of the dead ground, the Australians came on to the attack in column of troops, the men being opened out at intervals of thirty yards, with fifty yards' distance between troops. Extended in this way the 350 men of the corps created the appearance of a much larger force, and as they swarmed over the crest of the hill with fixed bayonets, the Boers without waiting for the attack retired to a second position some 1,200 yards away. Darkness was just closing over Diamond Hill when the Boers beyond opened a furious fusilade all down the line; the 2nd Coldstream Guards responded with equal energy. The sound as of a *feu de joie* was heard over the whole field. But this was the end, for the English had captured the key of the Boer position.

Botha retreats on the night of the 12th.

On hearing of De Lisle's success, General Botha had not only countermanded the reinforcement to De la Rey, but during the night silently withdrew all his men from their positions. Though Diamond Hill was still commanded by the ridges east of it and by Morskop and Donkerhoek, he saw that Ian Hamilton could easily bring his heavy artillery

on to the plateau next day and shell the burghers from all these points of vantage. He therefore decided to retreat while there was yet time. Sending his supplies and big guns by railway from Elands River Station, he allowed the commandos to disperse along various roads according to the usual method of Boer retreats.

Lord Roberts unconscious of his victory.

Lord Roberts was quite unconscious of his victory. On the night of the 12th he gave orders which indicate that he fully expected a vigorous attack by the Boers on the following day. Seriously troubled about French's precarious position, he ordered up the Lincolns and a battery from the Pretoria garrison to Kameeldrift to keep open a line of retreat for the cavalry. But he was still more anxious about his right flank. He had just received the news that Buller had turned Laing's Nek, and he thought it very likely that the Boers on the Natal border would immediately come up to reinforce Botha. He therefore ordered Kitchener, now that the immediate danger on the line of communication was past, to send up more troops to Pretoria, and Smith-Dorrien to bring up the Gordons and four guns from Elandsfontein to Tigerpoort. Pole-Carew was directed to hold on to the position gained near Donkerpoort and to bring up more artillery, but not on any account to move forward until Ian Hamilton had felt his way in the direction of Elands River Station. The 18th Brigade were to hold the centre as before, but Henry might be allowed to move cautiously forward towards Edendale provided he avoided any serious engagement.

June 13. Boers retreat unmolested.

The Boers began retiring at 11 o'clock on the night of the 12th, but carried out the movement so quietly that the British commanders discovered only next morning that there were no enemies in front of them. The pursuit, owing partly to the difficult nature of the ground, partly to Lord Roberts's unwillingness to let his troops get too far away from Pretoria, and partly to some delay on the part of the cavalry, was not carried out with any effect. On the south of the line De Lisle was the first to arrive at Elands River Station, whence he pushed on towards Bronkhorst Spruit. There he came into touch with some retreating Boers, but had to fall back again for want of support. Gordon was

delayed by the marshy ground on the way to Bronkhorst Spruit, and Broadwood arrived too late to find any Boers at Elands River Station. On the left flank French's cavalry arrived in the afternoon at Tweefontein, six miles from their former bivouac, only to see a Boer convoy disappearing in the distance.

Botha's tactics partially successful.

Again, therefore, as so often before, the Boers were merely pushed away and given the opportunity of fighting again. Full credit for this result is due, in the first place, to the excellence of General Botha's tactical dispositions, especially in so promptly extending and pushing forward his left flank directly he became aware of Ian Hamilton's presence at Zwavelpoort. His defeat might have been turned into a victory if De la Rey's men on the right flank had shown the same vigour against French as isolated detachments on the left flank showed against Broadwood; but the subordinate commanders, and even Botha himself, hardly rose to the opportunities which his own tactics offered. The fact is that they were all more concerned in securing their own retreat than in staking much on the chance of victory.

Roberts not at his best.

Lord Roberts, on the other hand, did not display his usual vigour or clearness of decision. The very serious danger to his lines of communication distracted his attention, and for these two days his mind was quite as much busied with de Wet as with Botha. Also the negotiations for peace, which were being conducted even in the heat of battle,* may to some extent have detracted from the resoluteness of the attack. Under these circumstances it would probably have been better, had Lord Roberts devoted himself entirely to the great strategical and political problems before him, and had left the conduct of the battle to French.

Though he was right to reject a wide turning movement,

The actual plan of attack adopted is not beyond criticism. One modification, indeed, of Lord Roberts's scheme, strongly urged upon him by his three divisional generals, he was probably right in rejecting. It was proposed that a moderate

* On the 12th, three emissaries from Lord Roberts penetrated the Boer lines, under a flag of truce, with a message for Botha about terms of surrender.

containing force of infantry and artillery should be left in front of Pretoria, and that the cavalry and mounted infantry should make a rapid flank march as far as the Wilge River, keeping well to the south of the ridges east of Pretoria, and strike the railway at Balmoral. The advantages claimed for this scheme were that the cavalry would have a comparatively open country to traverse, and might capture the Boer guns and stores, even if they failed in cutting off their whole army. The risks involved were that as soon as Botha perceived the movement, as he could hardly fail to do, he would either retreat in time or would come down in sufficient strength to defeat the containing force. Under other circumstances these risks might have been worth the chance of a decisive blow against Botha, but on the 10th of June the situation at Pretoria was not such as would warrant Lord Roberts in separating himself from all his mounted troops. De Wet's activity had already forced him to send away one brigade, Buller and Hunter were too far off to render any immediate assistance, his line of communications was cut, and he felt that if he divided the only force still left to him, and one half of it were involved in disaster, he would have nothing to fall back upon in his isolated position.

his dispositions were faulty.

But though the Field-Marshal was probably right in not entertaining this suggestion, it was undoubtedly a mistake to divide his force as he did. There are several indications that the intelligence and scouting on the English side were very defective at this time. If Lord Roberts had been fully informed of the nature of the country north of the line, he would hardly have sent French into the trap of Kameelfontein; and if the scouting was adequate, it is difficult to account for the facility with which the Boers were able to retire on the night of the 12th–13th, six clear hours before the English commanders had any inkling of their design. This bad intelligence partly accounted for the fact that there was no means of judging the most favourable point for a decisive blow on the Boer line, and that, instead of a well-planned battle, the operations resolved themselves into three isolated encounters of an indecisive nature. A couple of infantry battalions could have held the position

where French and Hutton's mounted troops were wasted, whereas the massing of the cavalry on the right flank would have probably resulted in the success of the enveloping movement. Again, if Lord Roberts had appreciated the weakness of Botha's centre and allowed Pole-Carew to create a diversion by a vigorous attack on the 11th, both Ian Hamilton and French would have had a better chance of succeeding.

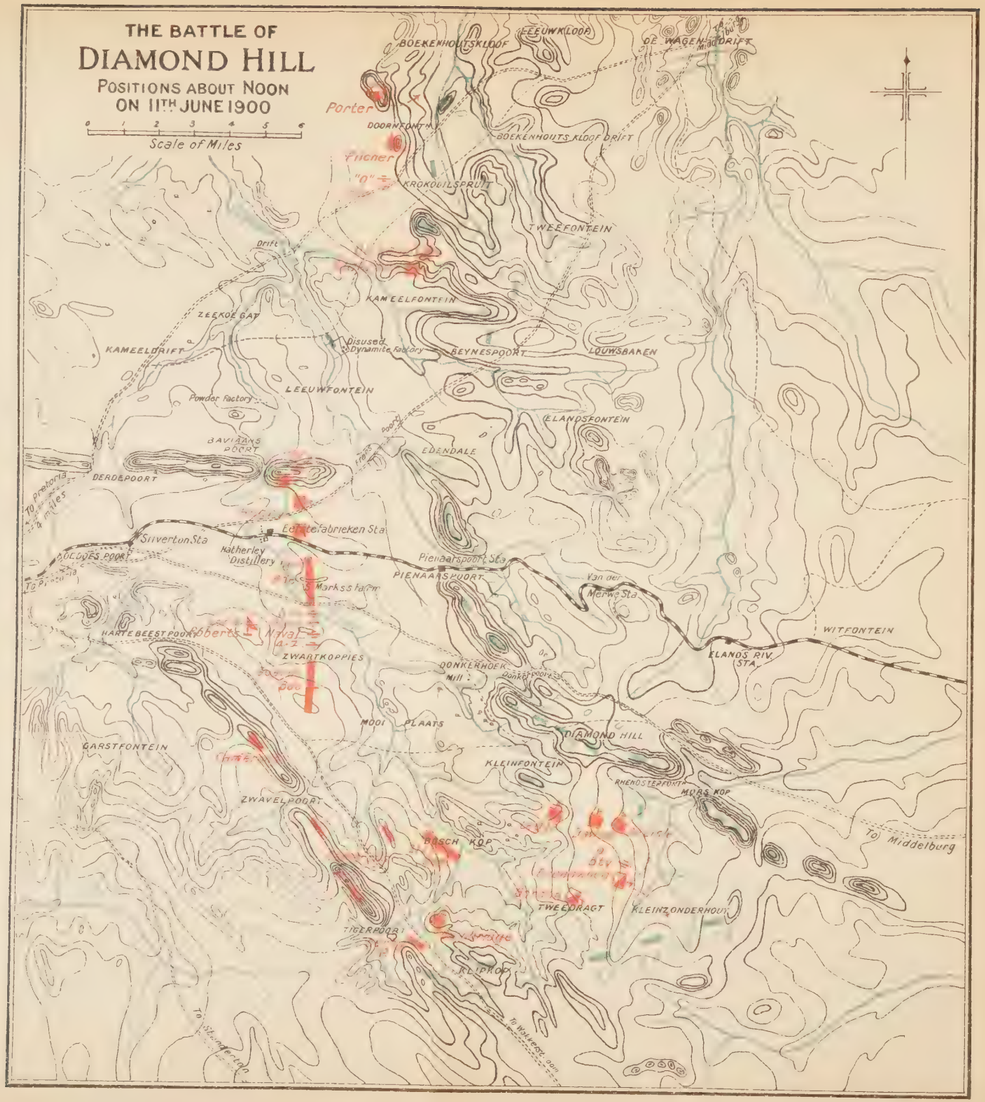
Roberts's fear of loss of life.

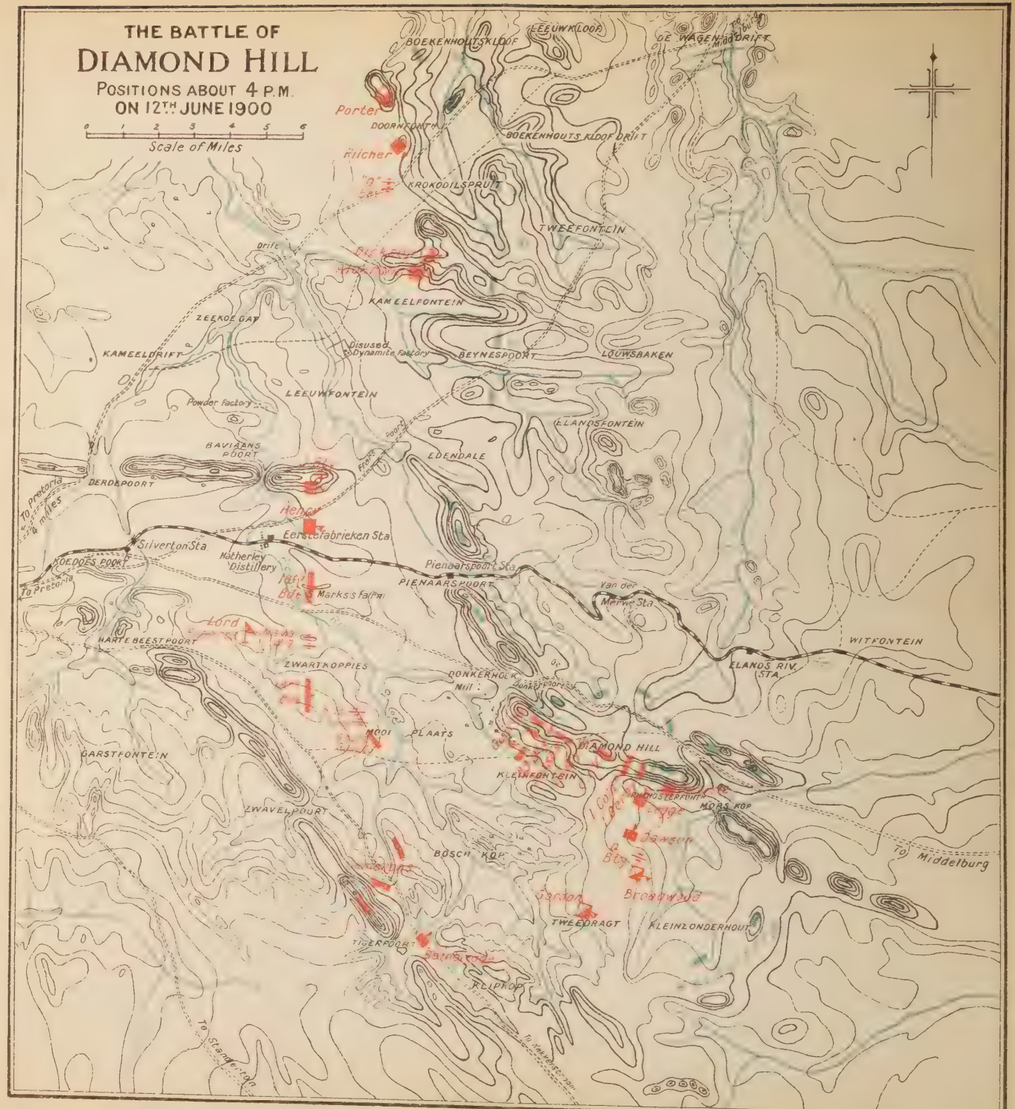
Another reason for the incompleteness of the Boer defeat lay in Lord Roberts's great anxiety to avoid loss of life. The orders to all his generals reiterate the injunction that no operation was to be carried out if it were likely to entail heavy loss, so that it was hardly to be expected that the Boers on their side would suffer heavily in the battle. Considering the number of troops engaged and the duration of the fighting, the English loss was remarkably small, the total casualties not amounting to more than 200, most of which were in Ian Hamilton's column. Thus Roberts, no less than the Boers, missed his chance of possibly concluding the war by a fear of staking too much on one vigorous stroke.

Hollowness of the English victory.

President Kruger, in his war bulletins, claimed Diamond Hill as a victory for his side. This was absurd; still, for the English it was but a hollow victory, if victory it can be called. It is true that the actual menace to the capital was removed, and there was no longer a Boer army concentrated at Donkerhoek, but the vigour of the Boers for offensive tactics was in no way impaired. Though their losses in the battle probably exceeded their own statement of four killed and twenty wounded, they were certainly very slight; De la Rey was able to cross over undisturbed, and stir up the war afresh in the Western Transvaal; and for more than a month the rest of Botha's commandos kept French, as well as Hutton, fully employed in the neighbourhood of the battlefield.

DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
Guns
Only those units that took a prominent part are shewn





CHAPTER IX

THE BRANDWATER BASIN

I

THE battle of Diamond Hill, which removed the immediate menace of Botha's army on Pretoria, coincided with the entry of General Buller's army into the Transvaal from Natal, and with the occupation of Rustenburg and Potchefstroom by Generals Baden-Powell and Hunter from the west. By the middle of June therefore the colonies of Natal and of the Cape had been almost entirely freed from rebellion or invasion. The Free State had been traversed from end to end and annexed to the British dominions, and in the Transvaal the capital and several of the principal towns were already in Lord Roberts's hands. The only portion of the five English or Dutch states in South Africa which Lord Roberts's armies had not touched were the country to the north and east of Pretoria in the Transvaal, and the north-eastern corner of the Free State.*

Roberts's position after Diamond Hill.

But the very rapidity and magnitude of Lord Roberts's success rendered his position for the moment more precarious, and the same map which measures his victory indicates also his weakness. The English at this time had over 200,000 soldiers in the field, the Boers possibly 20,000. But against this numerical superiority of the English must be set the following facts. In the first place, Roberts's main army had only one line of communication with its sea-base, and that a line over 1,000 miles in length. Secondly, in the invaded territories obedience could not be enforced nor protection afforded to neutrals except within the very restricted areas actually

Weak points in it.

* The extent of Lord Roberts's success may be measured by the map facing p. 268, which shows the respective positions of the British and Boer armies at the end of June.

occupied by British troops, with the result that about three-quarters of Lord Roberts's army was immobile, being required to hold the railway or strategical posts in the conquered territory. Lastly, Lord Roberts had no immediate means of increasing his numbers. On the other hand, the Boers, besides their force actually in the field, could always reckon on another fully as large dispersed on the farms, but ready on occasion to take their turn at fighting; they also could rely on a friendly population for supplies. Moreover, the Free Staters had nothing to tie them down, being free to disperse and gather again for any enterprise. In the Transvaal the presence of President Kruger and the Government on the Delagoa Bay line kept Botha's army within a more restricted area, but having only one fixed point to defend, it still had considerable scope for activity.

No great reduction of the Boer forces since Paardeberg.

Lord Roberts would no doubt still have been vulnerable, as long as he had only one line of supply, even if a very limited number of irregular bands of Boers had been able to roam about the country. In fact, however, since Paardeberg no defeat had been inflicted on the Boers serious enough to cause a permanent diminution of their fighting forces. Nor was this surprising, for since leaving Bloemfontein Lord Roberts had aimed at little more than advancing as fast as possible, counting on the moral effect of his progress rather than on real defeats. Surrenders indeed had been numerous after every important stage in the advance of a column, but they were surrenders either of men who had never fought with much alacrity, or of those ready to take up arms again as soon as a returning commando offered them an excuse. The Boer organized forces, therefore, as far as they ever were organized, were still unimpaired. Lord Roberts's first task now was to effect a permanent reduction of them.

Roberts's determination to conquer Boers in N.E. Free State.

His experience during the first week at Pretoria, when he found himself cut off from all supplies, had convinced him of his insecurity as long as the Free State commandos in the north-east of the new colony were still uncrushed. Even before the battle of Diamond Hill he had begun making plans for their defeat, and, as soon as that battle had given him a temporary respite, and Lord Kitchener had re-opened railway

communication with the south, he set in motion the columns which were to carry out his scheme.

Distribution of Free State forces.

The positions of the Boer forces in this part had now been determined, although their numbers were probably under-estimated at headquarters. For some time after the first capture of Lindley, Steyn and the Free State Government had been established between Frankfort and Heilbron within reach of the Transvaal, on which they still depended for their supplies of ammunition; Vrede was also useful to them for the same reason, as Lord Roberts had recognised when he tried to induce Buller to go there. But by the end of June Steyn had come down to Bethlehem, the only other place of any importance besides Harrismith still held by his Government. Round Bethlehem and Lindley the most active part of the Free State forces, including the Bethlehem, Heilbron, and Kroonstad commandos and Theron's and Scheeper's scouts were assembled under de Wet himself. The Harrismith and Vrede commandos were still guarding Van Reenen's Pass, the Ficksburg, Ladybrand, and Senekal commandos were holding Zuringkranz and the Wittebergen, the Winburg commando was in the Doornberg, and a small portion of the Heilbron commando were in their own district.

Roberts's scheme to deal with them.

Lord Roberts's first scheme for dealing with these forces was made known on June 14 in a circular telegram to his generals in the Free State. Besides Heidelberg in the Transvaal, Frankfort, Heilbron, Lindley, Senekal and Winburg were to be held with garrisons; Rundle, without losing control of his present line from Ficksburg to Senekal, was to move up to Bethlehem and Vrede, while Buller, at Standerton, blocked retreat into the Transvaal; and four flying columns, one from the Transvaal, MacDonald's from Heilbron, Clements's from Senekal, and Methuen's from the railway, operating in the area thus enclosed, were to drive all the Boers still left in arms to submission. The column chosen to co-operate from the Transvaal was Ian Hamilton's.* On the 16th June it was recalled to Pretoria from Eland's River Station, whither it had proceeded in the vain attempt to pursue the Boers

* Broadwood's and Gordon's cavalry brigades, Ridley's M.I. brigade, Bruce Hamilton's infantry brigade.

after Diamond Hill; three days later it started off towards Heidelberg, which was captured after a small fight on June 23. On this day Ian Hamilton unfortunately broke his collar-bone as a consequence of a fall from his horse. Luckily, however, General Hunter had just arrived from the Western Transvaal, and Lord Roberts transferred the command to him. The original plan was subsequently modified in other small details also, though in its main outline it remained unchanged. Rundle urged that the country towards Vrede was so difficult that he would require most of his force to enable him to reach it, and would thus have to leave the line he was now occupying dangerously exposed; finally he was told to remain where he was with the additional duties of garrisoning Senekal, in order to set Clements free, and of forming a second line, with headquarters at Trommel, in order to keep up the connection between Ficksburg and Winburg; he was also to detach 700 of the Colonial Division as a mounted force for Clements. To Clements was assigned the capture of Bethlehem, and Paget was ordered to join forces with him in that undertaking; Methuen was to hold Heilbron and patrol the country north of it and south as far as Lindley, thus setting free MacDonald. The idea of the operations which now took place was entirely Lord Roberts's, and though in the development of the scheme Hunter was put in immediate command of all the columns in the north-eastern Free State, Roberts himself kept a guiding hand on everything, and throughout received reports and issued occasional directions from Pretoria.

June 26–July 6. Expeditions to the Doornberg.

It will be noticed that the only force of Free Staters who were now outside the area contemplated for this first big "drive" in the war was the Winburg commando in the Doornberg, under the command of General Roux and Commandant Haasbroek. They were a menace not only to the railway but also to Clements's and Rundle's convoys marching to and from Winburg. Thus, on June 23, when Clements was going from Senekal to Winburg with a convoy of sick, he was attacked half-way by Roux, and, though he succeeded in driving off his assailants, he inflicted no serious damage upon them. On his return journey, therefore, he made an attempt

to deal with them. Expecting attack at the same place on June 26, he ordered Colonel Grenfell, in command of the mounted detachment lent to him by Rundle, to go from Senekal along the Kroonstad road to Leliefontein and fall upon the Boer rear while they were engaged in attacking his convoy on the Winburg-Senekal road further south. Grenfell * started on the night of the 25th, but at dawn next morning, instead of being in a position to attack, was surprised by a force of Boers who, unknown to him, had camped three miles south of his bivouac. They were in considerable strength, having five guns to Grenfell's two, and were pressing him hard, when he was extricated from his difficult position by the arrival of reinforcements under Brabant from Senekal. Thereupon the assailants moved off in a north-easterly direction. In this engagement a small party of the 35th company of Imperial Yeomanry disgraced themselves by running away without drawing rein until they reached Ventersburg, but on the other hand the two guns of the 8th Battery under Lieutenant Lowther did most gallant service. Meanwhile the Boers had been too busy with Grenfell to come near Clements, and though some of them went towards Lindley after Brabant had arrived, others still remained under Haasbrock at Meyer's Kraal, more to the west. Lord Roberts was so impressed with the danger of having them on this flank, that he ordered a flying column of 1,700 mounted men from Kroonstad under Colonel Hickman to make another attempt, in co-operation with troops from Senekal, to round them up. On July 6 Hickman from the north and the Colonial Division from the south met at Meyer's Kraal, only to find that the Boers had meanwhile fled towards Bethlehem. However, the object had been attained of driving them off to the main body, and the Doornberg was for the time being clear.

* Grenfell's force was composed of—
104 Cape Mounted Rifles.
104 Kaffrarian Mounted Rifles.
458 2nd Brabant's Horse.
80 35th Middlesex Yeomanry. } (not included in the force
60 Staffordshire Yeomanry. } (lent to General Clements).
2 guns 8th Battery, R.F.A.

June 28–July 1. Clements goes to Lindley.

Clements, meanwhile, on being relieved at Senekal by the Colonial Division, had started north on June 28. His force consisted of a brigade of infantry,* the 8th Field Battery, two 5-inch guns, and about 1,100 mounted men, including the 700 lent to him by Rundle. Even with this force, numbering altogether 5,000, he was glad of a diversion by Brabant on the Biddulphsberg in his right rear, to enable him to force his way past the Boers, who opposed him at almost every step. On July 1, Clements and Paget joined hands, after a skirmish outside Lindley.

Paget's position in Lindley during June.

Paget, during the month of June, had been having a troubled time in Lindley. This unfortunate town, or rather village, a desolate place in itself, seemed doomed in these early stages of the war to be the prey of every passing force, whether British or Boer, and in the fortnight between May 17 and June 1, it changed hands no less than seven times.† To both Boers and British the possession of the place was important, owing to its position at the beginning of the difficult country by which Bethlehem had to be approached from the north or west, being on the main road to that place from the railway line. It was too the centre of a country very valuable for the guerilla warrior, as it abounded with difficult kopjes and had plentiful supplies; and, as an additional reason for its retention on the Boer side, many members of the important Bethlehem commando, who, like all their countrymen, were particularly anxious to preserve their own district intact, were drawn from the neighbourhood. Consequently, when Paget was left here by Methuen on June 5 with three and a quarter battalions,‡ four guns of the 38th Battery, 150 Yeomanry, a section of R.E., and supplies for seventeen days, the Boer forces gradually came round, and invested him for

* 2nd Worcesters, 2nd Bedfords, 2nd Wilts, 1st Royal Irish Regiment.

† 1. May 17, Ian Hamilton drove the Boers out of it.
2. May 20, Boers returned on Ian Hamilton's leaving.
3. May 26, Colvile entered it.
4. May 27 (morning), Boers re-entered on Colvile leaving.
5. May 27 (afternoon), Spragge occupied it.
6. May 27 (evening), Boers reoccupied it.
7. June 1, Methuen entered it.

‡ 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, 1st R. Munster Fusiliers, 4th South Staffords, and two companies 4th Scottish Rifles.

MAJOR-GENERAL R. A. P. CLEMENTS, D.S.O., A.D.C.

COMMANDING 12TH BRIGADE.

Photo by Elliott & Fry.

MAJOR-GENERAL A. H. PAGET.

COMMANDING 20TH BRIGADE.

Photo by J. E. Middlebrook, Durban.

more than three weeks. They were mostly on the easterly side of Lindley; 700 of the Bethlehem commando, with one Krupp gun, were under Field-Cornet Serfontein, to the north-east; next to them came two small laagers of about 100 men each, then Piet de Wet's on his own farm Elandsfontein to the east, and Prinsloo's to the south-east; south of Lindley was a gun captured from the English, and small posts at frequent intervals, and at one period the Boers seized the kopjes previously held by Spragge's Yeomanry to the west. The numbers investing Lindley varied from time to time, as it became a storm centre round which the Boers kept gathering. Towards the end of the month, Theron's Scouts from the Transvaal, the Boer headquarters from near Frankfort, and Christiaan de Wet himself with most of his troops, must have brought up the total to nearly 4,000. Owing to the necessity of holding commanding positions, Paget had to spread out his small force over an area of ten and a half miles, the furthest point which he held being the Platkop, 5,000 yards north-west of the town, but, with his eleven carefully selected redoubts, he held his own. His success was due partly, no doubt, to his own enterprise, for he was not content simply to sit down and defend himself, but he confused and distracted his opponents' attention by several bold expeditions for the purpose of collecting supplies, and he made a determined attack on the Bethlehem laager; it was also, however, largely due to the extraordinary want of enterprise displayed by the Boers. As at Ladysmith, Mafeking, and Kimberley, they made no serious efforts to take the place at first when their enemy was unprepared and unintrenched, but waited till everything was ready for them; on this occasion, too, they were more than usually paralysed in their siege operations by the open discord between Prinsloo and Piet de Wet, for there was considerable dispute, which nobody seemed able to decide, which of the two was in chief command, so that the chance of co-operation between them was small. Piet de Wet had already opened negotiations with Methuen and Paget for a surrender, and though for the moment these negotiations were stopped by Steyn's orders, it may be suspected that he was already tired of the war, as he soon

afterwards surrendered on his own account. When Theron arrived, on June 23, he tried to instil a bolder spirit into the attackers, and the general onslaught of the 26th on the south and east and against the Platkop which cost Paget twenty-eight casualties was due to his initiative. Even this, however, was not carried out with the vigour necessary, and Theron retired much disgusted with this experience of the Free Staters' fighting. On the 27th a convoy came in with provisions and reinforcements for Paget from Kroonstad; the troops with it were half of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, previously sent by Paget to Kroonstad for convoy purposes, the 3rd Buffs, the East Kent and Middlesex I.Y., an Imperial Bushmen Corps, two guns of the 38th Battery, and the four C.I.V. guns, under the command of Colonel Brookfield. The troops escorting the convoy had two days' hard fighting at Doornkloof and Paardeplaats in order to force their way through, as de Wet had sent Olivier with a considerable force, including Theron's Scouts, to oppose their passage; but on their arrival, although desultory firing continued for some days, Paget was relieved of any further anxiety.*

July 2. Clements and Paget start towards Bethlehem.

After the junction of Clements and Paget, de Wet retired with his commandos to the ridges east and south-east of Lindley in order to defend the approaches to Bethlehem. On July 2 Clements began the march to Bethlehem† keeping himself to the more southerly of the two roads thither, and leaving Paget to follow the other. For the first three days of the march the Boers fell back gradually towards Bethlehem, fighting actions on successive ridges to delay the advance of the two brigades. None of these engagements calls for special notice except the Baken-

* Paget's force was now increased by the troops who had escorted the convoy except the 3rd Buffs and the two guns of the 38th Battery, which returned to Kroonstad with empty wagons. His mounted troops now consisted of:— 53rd (East Kent), 57th (Bucks), 58th (Berks), and 62nd (Middlesex) companies I.Y., a battalion of Imperial Bushmen, a company of Prince Alfred's Guards, and a company of I.Y. Scouts;—total about 1,000.

† Lindley was again evacuated, in spite of the protests of the English-speaking inhabitants, but on July 5, on direct orders from Lord Roberts, Clements sent the 2nd Bedfords and the Malta M.I. to garrison it; even these, however, remained there only a short time.

kop episode on the left flank. On the evening of July 2, Paget had occupied the ridge Plesierfontein eight miles east of Lindley, driving back the right wing of the Boers under Piet de Wet, Froneman and Michael Prinsloo. Piet de Wet then retired to Leeuwkop, six miles to the south-east, prolonging his line to the north-west along a ridge of which Bakenkop is the most prominent feature. On the 3rd Paget himself descended into the intervening valley with his infantry and two of the C.I.V. guns towards Leeuwkop, and sent 800 of his mounted troops, four guns of the 38th Battery and the two remaining C.I.V. guns, all under Colonel Brookfield, towards Bakenkop on the left. On reaching a ridge 4,000 yards from Bakenkop, Colonel Brookfield opened fire with his guns against the five Boer guns now directed upon him, and prepared to advance further with his mounted troops. Brookfield's guns were distributed in sections along the ridge, the C.I.V. guns being on the left, 130 yards from Captain Fitzgerald's section of the 38th Battery in the centre, and 210 from Lieutenant Belcher's on the right; but, though they were so close to one another, undulations in the ridge prevented any section from seeing either of the others. The mounted troops were all kept at intervals along the ridge behind the guns, even the gun escort of Yeomanry being withdrawn from its original place on the right front of the guns by order of Major Oldfield, in command of the artillery. After an inconclusive artillery duel, Major Oldfield, finding that the ammunition was running short, ordered the gunners to cease fire and to lie down by their guns. The mounted troops instead of advancing to co-operate with Paget were also kept idle. While Brookfield's force was thus marking time, the Boer guns suddenly opened fire with renewed vigour to cover a combined movement against the gun position organized by Piet de Wet. Collecting two parties of from 100 to 200 each of the most venturesome men in his commandos, under the leadership of himself, Froneman, and Michael Prinsloo, he made them dismount and creep up through the mealie fields which flanked the English position on both sides. This sudden attack created confusion in Brookfield's force; most of the

July 3. Battle of Bakenkop.

mounted troops had already been withdrawn under shelter of the ridge, those still lining the ridge fell back when the shell fire increased in intensity. Thus the guns were left absolutely without protection against their assailants. The C.I.V. gunners, under Major McMicking, were the first to notice the dismounted party advancing on their side, and began firing on it, but Belcher's gunners only realized the danger from the other party, which was the larger of the two, when it was almost upon them. Belcher immediately ordered case shot, but after one round he himself was shot dead, and the Boers took possession of his guns. When Fitzgerald saw these Boers approaching, he promptly gave the signal to his limbers to drive up and take away his section. One gun was taken away round to the C.I.V. position, but the other limber went by mistake towards Belcher's guns. There the drivers and horses were shot down, and Captain Fitzgerald, who was trying to extricate them, was severely wounded. Major Oldfield was at the moment with the C.I.V. guns, but on hearing rifle-shots he hurried, accompanied by his acting adjutant, Captain Budworth of the C.I.V. Battery, to the rise near Fitzgerald's guns. On reaching the top Oldfield was shot down, but Budworth managed to crawl away to his pony. Mounting it, he galloped back to a detachment of Imperial Bushmen whom he found retiring, turned them back, and led them up the ridge to recapture the guns. The two C.I.V. guns had meanwhile been put trail to trail, and McMicking was firing partly at the smaller party of Boers advancing on his left, partly towards the firing he heard in the 38th position. As soon as Budworth with the Bushmen reached the top of the ridge they fired some volleys at the first party of Boers now busily engaged in securing their prisoners, and preparing to remove Belcher's guns. Disconcerted by Budworth's sudden appearance they immediately retired, taking away some prisoners from the 38th Battery. Shortly afterwards other detachments of the mounted troops came up to the ridge and fired a few parting volleys at them. The other attack, against McMicking's guns, was also driven back. Paget on his side had now relieved the pressure from the Boer guns,

by directing a flanking fire on them from the other two C.I.V. guns, and finally, by seizing Leeuwkop, he forced the Boers to relinquish their position and retire towards Bethlehem. Thus the situation was saved; but it was a very lucky escape. If the Boers who had seized the guns had only left them and the prisoners for the moment and lined the ridge from which the Bushmen afterwards fired on them, or if Captain Budworth had not shown such prompt decision and courage in bringing back the Bushmen to the one place of vantage left, nothing could have saved the six guns from falling into the Boers' hands. If that had happened the situation of Paget's column, and indeed the success of both Paget's and Clements's operations on Bethlehem, would have been seriously compromised.

July 6–7. Attack and capture of Bethlehem.

Paget was the first to come in front of Bethlehem on July 5, but moved too far south in support of a reconnaissance by his Yeomanry. Clements, therefore, on arriving in the evening, was obliged to cross over to the left flank. On the morning of July 6, Paget, who was encamped at Waterval, about three miles from Bethlehem, was disturbed by shells from Boer guns. Clements shortly afterwards sent in a flag of truce requiring the surrender of the town, which was naturally refused; for de Wet had now 7,000 Boers defending Bethlehem, besides seven or eight guns in a very strong position, and he had no anxiety about the President or the women and children, whom he had sent to the Wittebergen out of harm's way. Since the English advance had been from the north-west, the Boers had placed their principal laager to the south-east, under cover of the town; the Boer right, composed chiefly of the Bethlehem commando and two guns under Piet de Wet, Froneman and Serfontein, extended over some ridges north and north-west of the town, where they commanded the crossing of the Liebenberg's Vley river and some country very difficult for an attack; their centre rested on Wolhuter Kop, a bold eminence rising south-west of the town, and their left flank trenches were carried round to the west to complete the demi-lune. Not only was this left flank naturally weaker, as the attack could be developed in folds of the hills and dongas, it was also the flank most important for

the Boers to defend in order to keep clear the way of retreat to the Wittebergen; consequently de Wet placed here most of his men under Roux and Haasbroek and five of his guns. Clements had on the previous day sent the Bedfords and some M.I. back to Lindley, so that he now had three battalions, 700 mounted men, a field battery, and two 5-inch guns of his own, besides Paget's force, making a total of between 7,000 and 8,000 men and 18 guns. Clements's original intention was to make a demonstration against the Boer centre at Wolhuter's Kop while his own mounted troops under Grenfell made a turning movement to the north of the town and Paget's under Brookfield to the south. Grenfell's turning movement was a failure, as the passage of the river, commanded by Boer guns and rifles, proved impossible, and Brookfield, though working in easier country, made no better progress. Next day Clements left the Boer right alone and concentrated all his forces on their centre and left. After preparing the way by a hot fire from his lyddite guns and his own and Paget's field guns, he sent the Irishmen and three companies of the Wiltshire Regiment to storm a strong ridge to the north-west of Wolhuter's Kop, while Paget advanced from the south towards Wolhuter's Kop. Before 9 o'clock the Royal Irish had carried their ridge and recaptured a 77th Battery gun lost at Stormberg; shortly afterwards Paget cleared the central kop. The Boers on the left and centre then retreated precipitately towards the Wittebergen, leaving the way clear to Bethlehem. The Boer right was withdrawn in a more leisurely fashion early in the afternoon, after they had found that their retreat might be cut off by Hunter's advance cavalry then on the way from Reitz. No pursuit was attempted in spite of the 1,700 mounted troops of his own and Paget's with which Clements might well have harassed severely, if he could not have cut off some of the retreating Boers. The victory was lightly bought, considering that the attacking force, though superior in guns, was numerically about equal to the Boers, for in the two days' fighting against an exceedingly strong position Clements had only 59 casualties and Paget 47. The fact is that the Boers had become thoroughly demoralised by

Clements's and Paget's successful advance from Lindley, and had no mind to make any stand, at any rate until they were behind the almost impenetrable barriers of the Wittebergen. Their own accounts show that they not only displayed great apathy in the defence of Bethlehem, but that there were even cases of desertion, which de Wet had to deal with in a very summary fashion. The two English generals had certainly done their work well, and, except in neglecting the chance of pursuit at Bethlehem, had let slip no opportunity of keeping the Boers on the run, which from the beginning to the end of the war was found to be the only successful strategy. Even their one mistake was venial, as they had achieved the great object of driving almost the whole existing fighting force of the Free State into a veritable trap.

II

The Boers retire to the Brandwater Basin.

The country to which the Boers had now retired may be described as a huge horse-shoe formed by the Wittebergen range, which extends round from Commando Nek opposite Ficksburg, by Moolman's Hoek, Nelspoort, and Witnek to Slabbert's and Retief's Neks on the north, and then by the Roodebergen range, which continues from Retief's Nek in a south-easterly direction through Naauwpoort Nek and Golden Gate to Generaal's Kop, a magnificent mountain mass which connects the main Drakensberg ridge with the Roodebergen; the circumference of the horse-shoe measured this way is roughly seventy-five miles. The base-line of the horse-shoe, about forty miles in length, is formed by the Caledon River, separating the Free State from Basutoland. The Wittebergen and Roodebergen, unlike the lower and more innocent-looking tablelands and kopjes of most of the Free State, are bold and jagged eminences, akin to their neighbours, the Basuto giants, which seem to offer no temptations to the unsuspecting foe, but to stand up in blunt and naked enmity. Outside the horse-shoe great off-shoots of the parent ranges jut out in all directions, spurs and promontories of rock broken and intersected with dongas and

spruits, or isolated kopjes standing like sentinels to bar the way. The horse-shoe is thus extended at least ten miles outwards towards Ficksburg on the south, Rooikranz, Witkop, and Zuringkranz on the west, north as far as the Langberg range, and east towards the great Mont aux Sources and the main chain of the Drakensberg mountains, at this time capped with their winter snows. The principal gates of this great citadel are four—Commando, Slabbert, Retief, and Naauwpoort Neks; but there are also a few posterns, such as Witnek and Nelspoort, Bamboeshoek and the Golden Gate, by which at need scouts could steal out or an enemy creep in. Inside this well-guarded enclosure the land is again cut up into deep chines and valleys by the fantastic cleavings of the plateau and by the three rivers—the Brandwater, the Little Caledon, and the Caledon—which generously water this favoured country, named after the river which runs through the central valley, the Brandwater Basin. Here may be seen deep kloofs where the grass is really green, rich cornland and fruitful orchards; and the farmhouses, more substantial than many of those in the more ungrateful soils outside, were at this time rich in all farmyard stock. This happy retreat, where peace and plenty dwelt, seemed to many of the commandos, weary of fruitless victories or of constant flight, one where they could rest indefinitely, regardless of their enemy's encompassing hosts; and here, except for a few stragglers or guerilla bands, all the fighting force of the Free State came. Men of Heilbron and of Kroonstad and of Bethlehem from the north, of Senekal and Winburg, of Bloemfontein and Thaba 'Nchu, of Wepener, Ficksburg, and Ladybrand from the central plains, and from Smithfield and Rouxville in the south; even the west sent men from Boshof, from Fauresmith, and from Jacobsdal, and from distant Griqualand a few stout rebels were led here by Van Zyl; Theron and Scheepers brought their scouts, drawn from nearly all the countries of the world; Transvaalers had come from their own lovely river at Potchefstroom to help de Wet; the men of Vrede and of Harrismith, too, were at last leaving their long watch over the Drakensberg to join the comrades whom they had last seen in the flush of victory

in Natal. Of the leaders Steyn himself was there, Christiaan and Piet de Wet, with Philip Botha, Olivier, Froneman and Steenekamp, Parson Roux, Crowther, Haasbroek, and Marthinus Prinsloo, and, dragged about with the army, Vilonel, the former commandant of Senekal, now awaiting sentence as a traitor to the cause.

June 28–July 9. Hunter marches from Heidelberg to Bethlehem.

But now the English forces were quietly gathering round them. On June 27 Sir Archibald Hunter had started out of Heidelberg with Ian Hamilton's column, constituted as follows:—The 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Brigades under Broadwood and Gordon, Ridley's Mounted Infantry Brigade, composed of the 2nd, 5th, 6th and 7th Corps, two squadrons of Scottish Yeomanry, Bruce Hamilton's 21st Brigade, the 76th, 81st, and 82nd Field Batteries, "P," "Q," and "R" Horse Batteries, two 5-inch guns, and 6 pom-poms; altogether he had 7,728 officers and men, 3,942 horses, and 32 guns. Two days later he crossed the Vaal and was joined at Frankfort by MacDonald, bringing from Heilbron 1,000 men and horses for Broadwood and Gordon besides his own force of three battalions of the Highland Brigade,* the 5th Field Battery, and about 400 mounted men of the Eastern Province Horse, Lovat's Scouts, the 42nd and 44th Companies I.Y., and the New Zealand M.I.; altogether 4,008 officers and men, 1,801 horses, and six guns. On July 7 Hunter was at Reitz, where he left Bruce Hamilton with three battalions† of his brigade, the 7th Corps M.I. (Bainbridge), and ten guns of the 82nd and 76th Batteries to guard surplus stores, and on the following day his advance guard was in Bethlehem, where Clements and Paget were already in occupation. He himself arrived there on the 9th.

Hunter takes stock of the position.

Hunter, who now assumed command of all troops in the north-east of the Free State, had, like Rundle, been in the Egyptian army, where he had risen in ten years from the rank of captain to that of major-general, chiefly on account of his personal courage and his skill in dealing with men.

* The A. and S. Highlanders had been left with two 4·7 guns and 50 M.I. as a garrison for Heilbron.

† The C.I.V. Battalion with two guns of the 76th Battery, the E.P. Horse, and 150 of the 5th M.I. Corps, all under Colonel Mackinnon, had been sent with an empty convoy to Heilbron from Frankfort.

At Ladysmith, as chief of the staff, he had shown personal courage and something more, for the organization of the defence rested largely on his shoulders; and during his short period in command of the Tenth Division he had shown a capacity for rapid action.* A Scotsman, exceedingly earnest about his profession, like many of his race he was a dashing leader, and at the same time cautious before committing himself. When he arrived in Bethlehem he found that Steyn and Christiaan de Wet were holding Retief's Nek and Piet de Wet and Prinsloo Naauwpoort Nek. Both Clements and Paget were of opinion that the Boers should not be left alone, but that forces should immediately be sent to block Retief's and Slabbert's Neks. But unfortunately Clements, who had hitherto been chiefly responsible for the operations against the Boers, instead of waiting to acquaint Hunter with the circumstances and his own views, had left on the same morning to fetch supplies from Senekal. He was therefore unable with the authority of the senior commander to reinforce the representations made by Paget. Hunter after consideration determined to mature his plan, without stirring from Bethlehem until he had been able to ascertain Rundle's dispositions and Bruce Hamilton had joined him with a convoy from Reitz.

Rundle's work during June.

General Rundle's force had during the month of June more wearisome work than any other English troops, although it had not any very tangible marks of success to stimulate its interest. The elusive enemy, drawn chiefly from the Ladybrand and Ficksburg commandos and scattered about in the western spurs of the Wittebergen, round Commando Nek, Willow Grange, Rooikranz, and Zuringkranz, had been constantly threatening to break out at one point or another, menacing the troops posted or marching along the line between Ficksburg and Senekal, and defying all the General's attempts to bring them to a definite engagement. It will be remembered that at the end of May, when Clements took over Senekal, the Eighth Division were holding the northern half of the road from Ficksburg to Senekal and the Colonial Division the southern half. Rundle very soon found that it

* See chap. vi.

LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR A. HUNTER, K.C.B., D.S.O.
COMMANDING 10TH DIVISION.

Photo by Bassano.

would be useful to transpose these positions, as the road from Ficksburg to Klip Drift Nek, halfway to Senekal, went through gorges and was at the western edge of difficult country, little adapted to mounted troops, while north of that the open plateau and the more distant positions of the Boers were better suited to the Colonial Division. Accordingly by June 14 he had brought the Colonial Division headquarters and his own mounted troops to Hibernia, about fifteen miles south of Senekal, and Boyes's 17th Brigade to Hammonia, with the duty of holding Ficksburg. But the line was still rather weak about Ficksburg, which was shelled on the 19th June. Rundle therefore, fearing that the Boers would break through, sent a reinforcement of Yeomanry thither, and a flying column under Colonel Main as far south as Brand's Drift in support; this attempt of the Boers came to nothing, and Colonel Main was recalled. Again, on the 20th, the Boers made a reconnaissance further north to a point as far as Doornkop, west of Hibernia, with a view to breaking through the cordon between that place and Senekal. Dalgety with 400 of the Cape Mounted Rifles was ordered to hold them until Rundle came up in support. He, however, allowed them to escape before they could be surrounded. Rundle then hurried up the Colonial Division to Laager Spruit, six miles south of Senekal, brought in the men he had at Trommel, secured the important position at Klip Drift Nek with the 1st Leinsters, four guns, and 100 mounted men under Colonel Martin, and sent Campbell with the 16th Brigade to Senekal. This march, performed with great promptness by the various troops concerned, effectually stopped any further attempt of the Boers in this quarter. Further changes were rendered necessary by the order from Lord Roberts that he should reoccupy Trommel; and on July 1, when Clements and Paget had joined hands at Lindley, Rundle's force was disposed as follows:—At Ficksburg were General Boyes's headquarters with two half battalions, three field guns, and a company of Yeomanry; at Willow Grange Boyes had another gun, half a battalion, and fifty Colonials; and at Hammonia there were one and a half battalions, two guns, and 300 Colonials under Colonel Main. Klip Drift Nek was held by Colonel Martin's

July 1–11. Positions held by Rundle.

detached force, Rundle was at Trommel with a battalion of Campbell's brigade, three guns, and five companies of mounted men, Brabant at Laager Spruit with 1,000 of his Colonials and seven guns, and Colonel Ward at Senekal with a battalion, two guns, and 100 Colonials. Besides that, a battalion, three guns, and three companies of Yeomanry were doing escort work between Winburg and Trommel and a battalion and two companies of Yeomanry were absorbed by the needs of Ladybrand and Thaba 'Nchu. At this time Rundle was being pressed from headquarters to support Clements's attack on the Boers near Bethlehem by vigorous action against those already in the Wittebergen. But he was afraid of weakening his line, by committing himself far into the mountains. No doubt it was essential that he should leave no loophole for the escape of Boers from the Wittebergen, but he would probably not have seriously jeopardised his position, if he had shown a little more enterprise against them when their friends in the north were being driven along by Clements and Paget. As it was, he began advancing very gradually in an easterly direction in order to push back the Boers from their advanced positions to the main Wittebergen ridge. On the 9th he moved out to the Biddulphsberg to give a hand to Clements, returning from Bethlehem with his empty convoy, and left a garrison there. On the 11th he seized Witkop opposite Witnek with the Colonial Division, brought Campbell down there, and, reinforced by Grenfell's mounted force now returned to him by Clements, placed containing forces at Witnek and Rooikrantz. By the time of Hunter's arrival in Bethlehem, therefore, he had brought his first line almost to the foot of the Wittebergen, and was watching all the exits as far north as Witnek.

Difficulties of the Boers in the Brandwater Basin.

Meanwhile, the Boers had not been entirely happy in their mighty fortress. Dissensions which had been latent for some time broke out during the period of rest. Thus the feeling against the foreign auxiliaries sprang up afresh in regard to the position of some of the foreign artillery officers, whose title to command was not willingly recognised by the Boers. This quarrel was patched up by Steyn's tact. A more serious trouble arose over the question of appointing

officers, always a difficulty with the Boers. The field-cornets and commandants, being elected by the burghers, were often afraid of exercising their authority as they should have done, for fear of alienating their supporters, and the consequences for discipline were disastrous. About this time, however, de Wet remedied this state of things by having a law passed whereby these officers were to be appointed by the Commander-in-Chief, subject to confirmation by the President. But no satisfactory solution was arrived at with regard to Marthinus Prinsloo's position. The dispute with Piet de Wet had apparently been settled in his favour, but now a fresh uncertainty had arrived whether he or Paul Roux, like himself an Assistant Commandant-in-Chief, was senior. Apart from these considerations, Steyn and de Wet were also beginning to feel grave doubts as to the advantage of remaining behind the mountains at all, in spite of the apparent strength. The dead ground and deep dongas giving approach to the precipitous hills were in favour of the attack, and were not nearly so well suited to the Boer tactics as the more open plains and low hills to which they were used. Secondly, the chief strength of the Boers, their mobility, was entirely lost in their present cramped position behind a rampart of mountains. Lastly, even if they could hold the Basin, what good would it do them? It led nowhere, and soon all its exits would be closed; and if only one or two exits were once closed, it might be very difficult for such a large force to utilize the others.

The roads in it.

The centre of the Basin is approximately the village of Fouriesburg, from which radiate most of the roads. One goes south-west to Commando Nek; another north to Kaffir Kop, where it branches into two roads finding their exits at Slabbert's and Retief's Neks. A third goes east across the Slaapkranz range, the watershed of the Caledon and Little Caledon Rivers, for about ten miles, when it also forms two branches; the one turns north to Naauwpoort Nek, the other continues east to Golden Gate; and a by-path from Naauwpoort Nek joins the latter road about seven miles from Golden Gate. The last part of this road is little more than a bad bridle track strewn with boulders and hanging over the edge

of the Little Caledon, which goes rushing down the gorge below.

They divide their forces and determine to escape.

Consequently, the Boers had not been here more than a week when a secret council of war, presided over by Steyn, decided that they should make their way out again. The Boer forces in the Basin were divided into three columns—the first* under Christiaan de Wet himself, with Generals P. Botha and P. de Wet, was to be accompanied by the President and to consist of 2,600 men; the second,† of 2,000 men, under Assistant Commandant-in-Chief Paul Roux, with Generals P. J. Fourie and Froneman; and the third,‡ under General Crowther, of only about 500 men. The first column, starting on the 15th, was to turn north towards Kroonstad and Heilbron, the second, which was to start a day later, was to make for Bloemfontein and the south, while Crowther's was to go as far as Witkop on the same day and to wait there until he could co-operate with the Harrismith and Vrede commandos under Van Hattingh, coming from the Harrismith direction. Besides these three columns Prinsloo was to keep the other half of the Bethlehem commando and the Rouxville commando, and hold the passes against the English, helped by Haasbroek, who, with the Winburg men, was to hold positions wherever he was most needed outside the passes. The plan was undoubtedly one which had elements of success in it, and had it been carried out would have meant a troublesome renewal of the war on a large scale for Roberts in the Orange River Colony. It may be said that the force destined to guard the passes was small, but it must be remembered that most of Hunter's force would have had to pursue the other three columns, and the few remaining could easily have been kept back by Prinsloo. The secret of

* To consist of the following commandos:—Heilbron (Steenekamp), Kroonstad (Van Aardt), half the Bethlehem commando (Michael Prinsloo), a few men from Boshof under Badenhorst, Van Zyl's Colonials from Griqualand, a few men of the Potchefstroom commando, and Theron's and Scheepers' Scouts.

† To consist of the following commandos:—Fauresmith (Visser), Bloemfontein (du Plooy), Wepener (Roux), Smithfield (Potgieter), Thaba 'Nchu (J. H. Olivier), Jacobsdal (Pretorius), and Bloemfontein (Kolbe).

‡ To consist of the following commandos:—Ficksburg (P. de Villiers), Ladybrand (Ferreira), Senekal (v. d. Merwe).

this plan had been well kept even from the majority of the Boers, and the first part of the scheme was carried through without a hitch. Just after sunset on July 15 de Wet, whose laager had been at Kaffir Kop, between Retief's and Slabbert's Neks, broke out with Steyn and his column and a convoy of 400 wagons and carts from Slabbert's Nek. There was no English force at the nek, and though English camp fires could be seen on the Senekal road farther north, this huge column, extending over 5,000 yards of road, passed within a mile of them so silently as not to attract attention. De Wet, indeed, had drilled those under his own immediate command to a most unwonted discipline on the march. The column was formed like a regular army, with an advance guard of the scouts and a few burghers followed by the President and his staff with their wagons, and de Wet's and General Botha's wagons; next followed the artillery—four guns and a Maxim—the convoy of wagons and Cape carts with the burghers riding on each side; and lastly a burgher rearguard.

July 15. De Wet and Steyn go out by Slabbert's Nek.

But though de Wet's first move had in itself been so successful, and deserves all praise, the same admiration cannot be extended to his and Steyn's forethought for the other Boers committed to their care. If ever it was the duty of men in such a position to stay behind and see personally that the whole programme of the retreat was carried out, it was in this case. Under any circumstances the retreat of 6,000 men from such a critical situation as that in which the Boer army then found itself, before the very eyes of a hostile army three times its size, was bound to be a matter of the greatest difficulty; the slightest hitch was likely to upset the most carefully laid plans. But here there were special causes which rendered a master's eye indispensable. The Harrismith and Vrede commandos, on whose arrival part of the combination hinged, were tarrying by the way; still more important, it was well known that nobody was left with an unquestioned claim to take supreme command if any mischance occurred. The disaster which subsequently befell the army left inside the Basin has been attributed to Prinsloo's incapacity or even to his treachery, but the chief cause undoubtedly was this sudden evasion by de Wet and Steyn, which cannot be

Criticism on de Wet and Steyn for leaving the others.

qualified otherwise than as culpable neglect almost amounting to desertion of their post. It is certainly the only occasion on which such a charge could fairly be brought against Steyn, but the whole incident illustrates de Wet's selfishness as a commander, which militated more than anything against his becoming a really great general.

Reasons why Hunter had not closed the neks.

When de Wet came unopposed out of Slabbert's Nek, Hunter had already been a week at Bethlehem, fifteen miles off, with about 12,000 men of his own force and Paget's, but had so far made no attempt to block the northern neks. The reasons for this delay were twofold, anxiety about the sufficiency of his supplies, and want of adequate information as to the nature of the country to be operated in. The

His anxiety about supplies.

importance of having enough supplies before venturing on an expedition into unexplored mountain paths was obvious. Unfortunately no British columns except Rundle's had at that time learned to depend chiefly on the country for supplies; and Hunter's bases were a great distance away. Heidelberg, indeed, was out of the question, as it would have taken a convoy eighteen days to go there and back, and the nearest depôts, Heilbron and Winburg, were each about six days' march from Bethlehem, so that it required at least twelve days to fetch in supplies from either of those towns. But when Hunter started from Heidelberg on June 27 he took with him fourteen days' supplies, and MacDonald brought him five more days' rations for their joint forces. Thus, when he marched out of Frankfort, although he had already sent away Colonel Mackinnon with the C.I.V. infantry and two guns of the 76th Battery to escort 100 empty wagons, his supply column still reached the formidable total of 440 ox wagons, containing enough food to keep his force on full rations till July 16. However, he took ample precautions to be on the safe side. On July 7 he sent another convoy of empty wagons from Reitz to be filled up at Heilbron. This convoy returned to him on the 19th.* On the 15th

* This convoy was sent out with an escort of the 1st Derbyshires, the four remaining guns of the 76th Battery, and four companies of the 7th M.I., under the command of Col. Cunningham of the Derbyshires. It reached Heilbron on the 11th and started back on the 13th with the same

Bruce Hamilton, who had been guarding the surplus stores of the original supply column at Reitz, brought them on to Bethlehem, and on the 17th Hunter sent out some more empty wagons to Winburg with an escort from Paget's force.* As a further precaution against a failure of supplies, and thinking that he could do without so many mounted men, he decided to dispense with Gordon's 3rd Cavalry Brigade and about 400 M.I. under Major M'Mahon, so on the 10th he sent them back with one of the horse batteries to Heilbron. Before Hunter's arrival in Bethlehem Clements had already started on the 9th to fetch more supplies for himself and Paget. He arrived at the Biddulphsberg on the 11th, and sent on all his wagons to Winburg, thus rendering his force immovable until they returned to him on the 18th. It will thus be seen that during Hunter's first ten days at Bethlehem there was a sensible weakening of his force owing to the fear of supplies running short.

His ignorance of the country.

The second cause of delay was General Hunter's very natural ignorance of the country in which he had to operate. The maps available of the Brandwater Basin and of its surrounding mountains were of the sketchiest description, and those which seemed to have the chief claim to completeness, such as the War Office map, revised up to February, were perhaps the most deceptive, as they carried an unwarranted appearance of exactitude. The intelligence branch

escort, together with the other two guns of the 76th Battery, and a Volunteer company of the Camerons. Col. Ewart, of the Camerons, took over the command from Cunningham, who was appointed Brigadier of a newly-formed brigade in Ian Hamilton's new division. On the 18th they met Broadwood, who was then pursuing de Wet. Broadwood helped himself to the stores he required and took on with him the Derbyshires and a section of the 76th Battery to guard his baggage. Thus Bruce Hamilton's brigade was reduced to two battalions during these operations, as it had lost both the C.I.V.'s and Derbyshires. But to make up for this loss Colonel Ewart picked up the garrison of Lindley, the 2nd Bedfords, and the Malta M.I., who had been detached from Clements's brigade on July 5, and brought them along with him. Lindley, it will thus be noted, was again evacuated by the English for the fifth time.

* Half bn. 2nd K.O.Y.L.I., 4th S. Staffords, two companies 4th Scottish Rifles, a section of the C.I.V. Battery, and a squadron of Bushmen under Col. Barter. This convoy did not return till Hunter's operations in the Brandwater Basin were concluded.

in South Africa, although it had by August of this year collected a good many descriptions of routes in the Orange River Colony, still had no information about routes east of the Ficksburg-Senekal line and south of Bethlehem; the only information of value at the General's command was from the half-dozen inhabitants of Bethlehem, Fouriesburg, and Harrismith who acted as guides, from a report on the topography of the Basin and the disposition of the Boer forces brought to him after de Wet's escape by an escaped prisoner, and from messages sent down by Sir Godfrey Lagden and the other Basutoland officials. Such information as he obtained in this way he supplemented by that obtained by Lovat's Scouts, who did excellent work in a very difficult country. The difficulty experienced in forming a true conception of the situation may be estimated from the various plans successively formed in order to secure the capture of the Boer forces.

July 13. His first plan of operations.

On July 13 Hunter's information, which was approximately correct, went to show that the Bethlehem commando under Prinsloo was at Naauwpoort Nek with eight guns, that de Wet held Retief's and Slabbert's Neks with 4,000 men and twenty guns, that Hermanus Steyn was at Commando Nek, and that Nelspoort was being watched by Boer pickets. At the same time it was suggested to him that Slabbert's and Retief's Neks could best be turned by a force of infantry advancing through Nelspoort. His first orders, based on this information, were that Boyes's Brigade should close Commando Nek, that Clements should come down from the Biddulphsberg and, with his own brigade and the garrison at Klip Drift Nek, attack Nelspoort; Rundle was to go round to Slabbert's Nek with most of his force; Hunter himself, with the Highland Brigade, would go to Retief's Nek, and Bruce Hamilton with Broadwood to Naauwpoort Nek; Paget, reinforced by the convoy escort returning from Heilbron, was to cover Bethlehem and act as a reserve. But no assaults were to be delivered till Clements was ready, probably about the 18th. The next day, on erroneous information from Basutoland that the Boers were massing in great numbers at Commando Nek in order to break out near Ficksburg, he

July 14. His second plan.

ordered the whole of Rundle's force to keep south of Nelspoort, Clements still to attack that pass, Paget to go to Slabbert's Nek, and Bruce Hamilton to Naauwpoort, while he retained Broadwood, Ridley, and MacDonald to act as a mobile force; this time the assault was to be postponed till the 20th. This was not the final plan adopted, but at length, on the 15th, a move was made, and Paget marched out of Bethlehem to take up his position outside Slabbert's Nek.

July 15. De Wet passes close to Paget.

After dark on July 15 Paget reached the farm Sebastopol, about nine miles from Bethlehem along the Senekal road, and ten miles from Slabbert's Nek. During the afternoon he had seen a small laager in Slabbert's Nek, but he apparently took no special precautions on this account. The Nek was not reconnoitred, nor were pickets sent to any distance from his bivouac during the night. De Wet was thus able to pass unchallenged. Paget, therefore, though undoubtedly sent out too late, cannot escape some share of the responsibility for de Wet's escape. Next morning it was reported to him that a Boer commando from Slabbert's Nek had crossed the road during the night. Broadwood, who had also been sent towards Senekal with a view to strengthen Rundle, soon caught up Paget, who had early come into touch with the Boer rearguard near the farm Bultfontein. At first there was almost a panic in the Boer forces at the approach of the English, but de Wet soon set that right, and made an example of some Cape cart drivers who had tried to rush off out of their turn. He then adopted his usual tactics and allowed the huge convoy to go on towards Lindley, while with three of his guns and his fighting burghers he took up a strong position on the Witklip ridge, north of the Senekal road. The guns were admirably concealed among the boulders of a kopje sloping down to some mealie-fields, where an advance party of his riflemen were posted. Broadwood was sent on to turn de Wet's right flank. Instead, however, of sweeping round clear of the flank, he made an attempt to dislodge it by a direct attack, which failed, in spite of the gallantry of his troops. Meanwhile Paget had kept his 38th Battery and his infantry south of the Senekal road to watch the approaches from Slabbert's Nek; with his Yeomanry and

July 16. De Wet fights a rearguard action against Paget and Broadwood.

C.I.V. guns he made a direct attack on the front of the position taken up by de Wet's rearguard. Here the Boers had some trouble in holding their own; Strydom's centre gun was within an ace of destruction from a well-placed shell, and Steyn himself had to remain in the fighting line to cheer on his burghers. But in the end this attack also failed, largely owing to de Wet's excellent choice of ground, whereby he could shoot under cover, while the C.I.V. guns had to come into action on a perfectly exposed plain. That night de Wet, after holding his ground all day, rejoined his convoy at Osplaat, about an hour's march north of Witklip. On the following day Broadwood, who had been reinforced by all Ridley's M.I. except the 7th M.I. Corps and the 5th M.I. battalion, started off in pursuit.*

Criticism of Hunter for allowing de Wet's escape.

Hunter himself, in his dispatch to Lord Roberts, was one of the first to admit quite frankly that in respect of de Wet's and Steyn's escape from the Basin he failed in carrying out his instructions; whether his difficulties justified him in his failure he leaves an open question. To the critic after the event it is, no doubt, an easy matter to point out how a mistake might have been avoided or a success attained; his criticism is only valuable if he has succeeded in throwing himself into the position, with its disadvantages as well as its advantages, of the general criticised. An attempt has been here made to indicate to the full the difficulties of General Hunter's position; the question is—Were they sufficient to account for de Wet's escape? Were his defective intelligence and his anxiety for supplies such as to make it impossible for him to detach a force to watch at least one of the northern neks? Although it was represented to him, as soon as he arrived in Bethlehem, that Clements's and Paget's operations since Lindley had thoroughly demoralized the Boers, and that to crush them it was only necessary to keep them on the run, he was, perhaps, wise not to allow any actual penetration of the neks until he was quite certain of his ground and had satisfied himself about supplies. Nevertheless, even if he had stayed himself in Bethlehem with his cavalry and the Highland

* See chap. xii. for an account of the pursuit of de Wet.

Brigade, there was no reason why Paget's Brigade should not have been sent on June 9 to eat their supplies outside Slabbert's Nek, the only one of the three northern exits not commanded by a force at Bethlehem. Had this been done, de Wet could never have come out where he did; the western exits were guarded by Rundle, and even if the Boer leader had tried Naauwpoort or Retief's Neks he would either have had to run the gauntlet of the Bethlehem force or to wander away through very difficult country to Harrismith, which would have been another *cul-de-sac*. Moreover, the whole of Hunter's anxiety about supplies seems to have been somewhat excessive. When he arrived in Bethlehem he had five days' supplies in hand, and supplies for three more days at Reitz, only twenty-four miles off, so that under the circumstances he would not have shown excessive audacity if he had moved down with his whole force to the positions he occupied a fortnight after he first came to Bethlehem. Even with his defective knowledge of the country, he would not have risked more than he did by sitting in Bethlehem.

III

Hunter's third and final plan.

It was not till after de Wet's escape that the third and final plan was made for the whole field of operations. To begin with, Rundle, though his command was no smaller than the whole force which Hunter could now dispose of, was still not satisfied that he could hold the line securely from Witnek to Commando Nek; so it was decided that Clements should detach a battalion and a half with four guns and 200 I.Y.* under Colonel Hacket Pain to relieve Campbell at Witnek and Witkop, and in exchange Grenfell, with 400 2nd Brabant's Horse, went back again to Clements; thus Campbell, with two battalions and about 1,100 Colonials and Yeomanry, was left free to take up Rundle's own position at Rooikranz and Bezuidenhout, which covered Nelspoort and the Moolman's Hoek exit; Boyes, with three battalions and about 500 mounted men, still held Ficksburg, Willow Grange,

* 2nd Worcesters, half 2nd Wilts, 200 Wilts and Yorks I.Y., four guns 8th Battery.

and Hammonia, and Rundle himself had a battalion and 1,000 Yeomanry and Colonials to act as a mobile column in the region of Hammonia. Clements, with his two remaining field guns, his two 5-inch guns, two battalions and a half of infantry, and his mounted men,* was to join Paget† at Slabbert's Nek. Hunter himself, with the Highland Brigade less the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 20 field guns and pom-poms,‡ two 5-inch guns, and 200 mounted men,§ was to attack Retief's Nek, and Bruce Hamilton, whose brigade had now been reduced to one infantry battalion with 550 mounted men, a battery and a pom-pom,‖ was directed to seize Spitzkranz, a hill twelve miles from Bethlehem and ten miles from the entrance to Naauwpoort Nek.

Boers left facing Hunter.

Excluding de Wet's party and the Harrismith and Vrede commandos, who had not yet entered the mountains, the Boers now facing Hunter were distributed as follows. 1,500 of the Ficksburg, Ladybrand, and Thaba 'Nchu commandos under Crowther were holding the western face of the Wittebergen opposite Rundle; a commando of about 400 under Haasbroek was at Naauwpoort Nek with fifty men of the Bethlehem commando under Blignaut as an advanced post on Spitzkranz; about 2,500 of Roux's and Prinsloo's commandos held Retief's and Slabbert's Neks. Thus already the arrangement of the commandos made by de Wet had been altered. On July 20, when the first real move was made by Hunter on the mountains, the Harrismith and Vrede commandos, with three guns under Van Hattingh and

* 2nd Bedfords (now brought back from Lindley), 1st Royal Irish, and half battalion 2nd Wilts, Staffordshire I.Y., Royal Scots M.I., and 2nd Brabant's Horse.

† Paget now had half battalion 2nd K.O.Y.L.I., 1st Royal Munster Fusiliers, six companies 4th Scottish Rifles, four guns 38th R.F.A., two guns C.I.V. Battery, 300 I.Y.

‡ Two sections 76th Battery, 81st Battery, 5th Battery, four pom-poms.

§ It will be remembered that Hunter had sent away Gordon's cavalry brigade on July 11, and Broadwood's with Ridley's M.I. had gone in pursuit of de Wet.

‖ Bruce Hamilton had already lost the C.I.V. and Derbyshires, the Sussex were holding Meyer's Kop, a hill about ten miles west of Bethlehem, where there had been some skirmishing with Paget's Yeomanry on July 13, so that he had only the Camerons left. His battery was the 82nd, and Colonel Bainbridge was in command of his M.I.

C. J. de Villiers, had reached another farm called Sebastopol, ten miles north-east of the Golden Gate. These two commandos had shown a most deplorable dilatoriness in leaving their positions near Harrismith after receiving Steyn's orders; in particular the Vrede burghers had been very loth to leave their own district unprotected, and it was only after a second peremptory order from Steyn and repeated representations from Van Hattingh that the latter succeeded in bringing away his commandos on July 16. It was largely owing to this delay that Roux did not like to leave the Brandwater Basin with his division on the 16th as he should have; for part of the arrangement had been that the Harrismith and Vrede commandos should by that time be in touch with Crowther's force.*

* It may be of interest to subjoin here in tabulated form the positions of the British forces outside the Brandwater Basin and of the Boer forces inside on July 20:—

BRITISH.

—	Infantry (battalions or companies).	Colonial Division.	Other Mounted Troops.	Guns.
Rundle:				
Ficksburg and Willow Grange	1½ *bns.*	50	100	4
Hammonia	1½ ,,	280	100	2
Rooikranz West	1 ,,	100	100	4
Bezuidenhout	1 ,,	700	200	2
Biddulphsberg	½ ,,	30	..	1
Senekal	½ ,,	70	..	1
Trommel	3 *cos.*	..	..	2
Riet Spruit (20 miles west of Senekal)	2 ,,	..	..	2
Ladybrand	5 ,,	..	150	
Thaba 'Nchu	3 ,,	..	50	
Movable force near Hammonia	1 *bn.*	700	300	10
Clements:				
Witkop	2 ,,	..	100	4
Palmietfontein	1 ,,	..	400	4
Paget:				
Bultfontein	1½ ,,	..	250	6
(Detached)	1 ,,	..	50	2
Hunter:				
Bethlehem	4 ,,	..	200	22
Bruce Hamilton:				
Between Naauwpoort and Bethlehem	1 ,,	..	550	6
	19 *bns.**	1,930	2,550	72

* Approximately 14,000 men.

July 20. Bruce Hamilton starts towards Naauwpoort Nek.

Early on the morning of the 20th, Bruce Hamilton's battalion with the Burma M.I. and the artillery started off in a south-easterly direction from Bethlehem; the rest of Colonel Bainbridge's M.I. were sent off well to the left to clear the ridge on the left bank of the Liebenbergs Vley. The whole force amounted to little more than 1,300 men. The infantry and Burma M.I. encountered some slight opposition, which they cleared away without much difficulty, and by the evening the whole force was established on the end of a ridge two miles distant from Spitzkranz. When news of Bruce Hamilton's advance was brought about 5 P.M. to the Vrede and Harrismith commandos at Sebastopol, sixteen miles off, General de Villiers immediately went off with reinforcements, marched all night, and arrived by the morning of the 21st in time to co-operate with Blignaut's little band of fifty on Spitzkranz. The Vrede men were sent with one gun on to Spitzkranz, while de Villiers took the Harrismith men with his two Krupps on to ridges further to the north-east, which had been searched by Colonel Bainbridge on the previous day. Bruce Hamilton left a company of the Camerons with two of his guns on the end of the ridge which had already been made good, sent Colonel Bainbridge again to the north-eastern hills, to keep off a flank attack by the Harrismith commando, and the Burma M.I. to his right flank on the west of Spitzkranz. Then, with four guns and the remainder of the Camerons,

Boers.

—	—	Commandos.
Western face of the Wittebergen .	1,500	Ficksburg. Ladybrand. Thaba 'Nchu.
Slabbert's and Retief Neks . .	2,500	Roux's and Prinsloo's commandos.
Naauwpoort Nek	400	Winburg.
Spitzkranz	50	Bethlehem.
Sebastopol	1,500	Harrismith and Vrede.
	5,950	

The Boers had at least 18 guns among them.

he attacked Spitzkranz, which forms a rough square with sides about a mile long and having its principal summits on the east and west. One of the companies attained the western summit about midday. That on the east was more difficult of approach and was hotly defended by the Boers intrenched there, who inflicted some losses on the two companies sent to attack them. But by nightfall the guns, aided by the Camerons on the western summit, had cleared the eastern crest also. The whole hill was in Bruce Hamilton's hands with a total loss of three killed and twenty-seven wounded after two days' fighting. The Boers retired from Spitzkranz to a hill called Little Spitzkop, five miles further south; the Harrismith commando had also been forced to give way before Bainbridge. On the 22nd and 23rd Bruce Hamilton held Spitzkranz, sent out mounted infantry to secure the flanking hills and made a demonstration against Little Spitzkop, his object being to keep up a communication to his right with Hunter at Retief's Nek and to make clear as much of the way to Naauwpoort Nek as he could. His operations were in this respect quite successful.

July 21. Seizes Spitzkranz.

On the 22nd, orders were sent round by General Hunter that on the following day simultaneous attacks should be delivered on the Retief's Nek, Slabbert's Nek, Witnek, and Commando Nek entrances to the Basin. On the night of the 22nd a tremendous storm sprang up with wind and drenching rain, which on the higher positions turned to snow; the camping grounds became a sea of mud, the men were drenched, and in some cases the stampeding of horses delayed the morning start.*

July 22. Orders sent for simultaneous attacks next day.

Hunter himself with MacDonald's three battalions, Rimington's Guides, Lovat's Scouts, the 5th Battery and

July 22–24. Hunter captures Retief's Nek.

* The violence of the storm and at the same time the difficulty which Hunter had in communicating with the various columns under his direction is well shown by the following story. On the evening of the 22nd the signallers on Witkop had begun sending the orders to Hacket Pain at Witnek. The message had gone as far as the day for the demonstration, but the storm sprang up before the hour could be sent through. Next morning a fog again delayed the message, which could not be delivered in full until the hour appointed had passed.

four guns of the 76th and two 5-inch guns left Bethlehem on the morning of the 22nd by the Naauwpoort Nek road as if he were going to Bruce Hamilton's assistance. After successfully deceiving the Boers at Retief's Nek as to his intentions, he turned west, and arrived in the evening at Boshoff's Farm, about three miles from Retief's Nek; that evening he sent for Colonel Donne with the Sussex Regiment and the 81st Battery to join him from Meyer's Kop. Leaving the Seaforths and the 76th Battery guns in charge of the convoy, he started at daybreak on the 23rd, and after marching about two miles, arrived on a ridge, from which across three miles of slightly undulating downs of grass Retief's Nek came into full view. The pass is only a few hundred yards across from cliff to cliff, flanked on the east by a hill of white rock, honeycombed with innumerable caves and crevices; from this hill the ground rises precipitously to a mountain very like Gibraltar in outline, then merges into a series of hills and high plateaux; on the west the pass is commanded by a steep conical hill called Tuifelberg or Spitzkop, then come more precipices and ridges. The Boers here, under the command of Prinsloo himself, were partly protected by natural fissures in the ground, partly by the excellent trenches they had made across the pass itself, on Tuifelberg, on the crevassed cliff east of the pass, and on the ridges beyond, They had been induced by Hunter's ruse to weaken their forces by sending a party towards Spitzkranz on the 22nd, but they still held what seemed an almost impregnable position. The first thing Hunter did was to bombard the Boer positions with a well-sustained artillery fire from his ridge, and to send off Lovat's Scouts and Rimington's Guides, supported by the Black Watch, well out on the left to seize a long narrow-backed kopje midway to the main Boer position; the Highland Light Infantry he kept back until the Sussex and 81st Battery came up about midday. When the Black Watch had gained the narrow-backed kopje they found it impossible, owing to the fire from the main ridge in front of them, to advance further until attacks had been developed by the Sussex and the 81st Battery against Tuifelberg on the right,

and by the Highland Light Infantry against the crevassed cliff on the left of the pass. The Sussex Regiment gained a footing on the slopes of Tuifelberg, but were exposed to so hot a fire from their front and right flank that they were forced to retire to the more protected position in the rear held by the 81st Battery; the H.L.I. were also exposed to a hot fire all the time of their advance, but succeeded in maintaining the position they reached just under the edge of the cliff. The only step really gained on the 23rd was by the Black Watch, who, by a gallant assault at dusk, captured the main ridge on the left, whence they could look down on Bamboeshoek and the Brandwater Basin in rear of the Boers. During the night three of Lovat's Scouts discovered that the Gibraltar-like hill, between the ridge captured by the Black Watch and the nek, was unoccupied. In the early morning of the 24th, therefore, they guided the Volunteer company of the H.L.I. up it before the Boers had arrived to resume the post, which, as usual, they had abandoned during the night. But the Black Watch and the Company of the H.L.I., unsupported, were not strong enough to hold the ground won, as the Boers were still on the hills beyond, from which they could direct rifle and gun fire upon them. Hunter, therefore, directed all his efforts to securing the positions already attained, and paid no further attention to Tuifelberg and the Boer left. He recalled the Sussex and the 81st Battery, kept the Sussex to guard the convoy, and brought up the Seaforths with the four guns of the 76th Battery to capture the hill still further to the east of the Black Watch; the 5-inch guns with a section of the 5th Battery were sent forward in support of the Black Watch and H.L.I., and the pass itself was bombarded by the 81st and two sections of the fifth Battery. By midday the Seaforths had cleared the Boers from the most eastern part of the ridge and, together with the other two Highland regiments, began climbing along the ridge and down the reverse slope towards the Boer encampment. By 3 o'clock the Boers were all on the run towards Fouriesburg; they could probably have offered a more stubborn resistance on this day, but when Prinsloo heard about 11 o'clock that Paget and Clements had already

forced Slabbert's Nek, he gave the order to retire to avoid being taken between two English columns. On that evening Hunter bivouacked south of the nek at Retief's Farm. The two days' fighting had cost him twelve killed and eighty-one wounded; most of the casualties had occurred on the first day and were nearly equally distributed among the three regiments engaged on that day.

July 22–24. Clements and Paget capture Slabbert's Nek.

On the 22nd, Clements with a section of the 8th Battery, two 5-inch guns, the first Royal Irish Regiment, the 2nd Bedfords and half the 2nd Wilts, the Royal Scots M.I., and 400 of Brabant's Horse under Colonel Grenfell was at Bester's Kop; Paget with the four guns of the 38th Battery, two C.I.V. guns, the Munsters, and part of the K.O.Y.L.I., six companies 4th Scottish Rifles, and 200 mounted men at Bultfontein. On the morning of the 23rd the two forces joined hands two miles north of Slabbert's Nek. This pass, though separated from Retief's Nek on the north side of the mountain by intervening spurs, which cause the road between them to cover about seventeen miles, is only about seven miles distant by road on the south of the range, so that the defenders of the two neks could easily communicate with one another. The road from the north takes a slight turn to the east as it passes through the nek, so that the actual entrance to the pass is concealed by what appears, until the last moment, to be a dead wall of rock. On the west the cliffs rise to a height of 2,000 feet from the road, buttressed by lower ledges; on the east, the ridge also rises up to a considerable height. The Boers had taken up positions on the crests of the ridges, but their main trenches were on the lower ledges immediately opposite the road; they had two guns and a pom-pom concealed by these trenches, and another pom-pom near some trenches on the eastern spur of the hills. The attack on Slabbert's Nek followed much the same course as that on Retief's Nek. Clements massed his artillery on a low ridge about two miles from the Boer centre, sent the Munsters about a mile further on as a containing-force, and directed all his efforts to turning their left. First Colonel Grenfell and the mounted troops were sent to a spur from the main ridge on

Clements's immediate right, but they were soon checked by Boers in the caves and ledges above them; reinforced, however, by two companies of the R.I.R., they succeeded in holding their ground; two companies of the Wiltshires, under Colonel Carter, sent to a ridge further to the right, met with a very similar experience. The main body in the centre had meanwhile been coming in for an unusually heavy fire from the Boer guns and pom-poms, so that by nightfall of the 23rd Clements was no further forward than Hunter. However, here again some adventurous scouts, this time of Brabant's Horse, had found out that a commanding summit of the western ridge was unoccupied. At 4.30 A.M. on the 24th Clements sent a party of Brabant's Horse to this ridge, and Colonel Guinness, with some R.I.R. and Wiltshires, to a spur of the main ridge between his own position and that of the Boers. When these two parties had gained the summit, about 8 A.M., they speedily drove the Boers from their positions. By 11 o'clock they had completely evacuated the nek and were in full flight towards Fouriesburg; a pursuit was attempted, but without success. Clements's losses were very slight in this successful engagement, only eight killed and thirty-four wounded, all on the 23rd.

July 23. Rundle's demonstrations.

Down the western side of the Wittebergen the operations on the 23rd July were of a far less interesting description; there was no serious attempt to carry positions, but demonstrations were made on a large scale to keep the Boers from breaking out. Of these demonstrations, Colonel Hacket Pain's * was the most effective; the Boers were occupying a kopje in front of Witnek and were separated from the English on Witkop by a valley cut through by a deep donga. Colonel Hacket Pain made his dispositions very carefully, and succeeded in turning the Boers off their kopje and driving them through the nek. This pass, however, would never have been of much use to the Boers as an exit, for it was narrow and rough, and led into almost equally difficult

* It will be remembered he had two sections 8th R.F.A., one battalion Worcesters, half battalion Wilts, two squadrons I.Y., all from Clements's force.

country.* Campbell† made a demonstration all day against the slopes of Rooikrantz, in front of Nelspoort, while Dalgety, with 500 of the Colonial division and four guns, attacked about 100 Boers on the slopes of the same mountain, where it covered Moolman's Hoek. Rundle's own mobile force co-operated with Boyes in demonstrating against various kopjes at the entrance to Commando Nek. Abricoos Kop was assigned to Colonel Main, with two guns, half a battalion, and some M.I.; on his right flank Colonel Romilly, with two battalions, four squadrons of Yeomanry, and six guns, was told to seize July's Kraal if it could be done without much loss; the hill remained in the Boers' possession, though they had only one gun against eight of the English; and further south a force of a battalion and a half and two guns, under Colonel Savage from Boyes's brigade, acted in the direction of Zoutkop.

July 25–26. Rundle rides into Fouriesburg.

On the 24th the demonstrations were continued, but on the 25th Rundle received information from Hunter that he, Paget, and Clements were inside the Brandwater Basin, and that the Boers had fled south to Fouriesburg. Rundle thereupon showed no lack of vigour. Mounted troops were pushed forward to seize Commando Nek, which they did without opposition; Rundle himself, with more mounted troops, two battalions and six guns, moved through the nek, leaving a company of Boyes's brigade to intrench and guard it; General Campbell and the Colonial Division were also ordered to advance on Fouriesburg. On the 26th Rundle took his mobile force a march of twenty miles through General's Nek to Brindisi. Here a report was brought to him by Driscoll's Scouts, whom he had previously sent forward, that they had found the Boers just leaving Fouriesburg in the direction of Hunter's force, about six miles north; the English prisoners found there had been armed, but Hunter might drive the Boers back into the town at any moment. Rundle immediately called for volunteers

* No doubt the exaggerated importance attached by Hunter to Witnek was due to the War Office map, which showed it as a fine, broad exit on the level.

† Campbell had at Bezuidenhout's Kraal two guns 79th R.F.A., 2nd Grenadiers, 8th and 33rd Companies I.Y.

from the Leinsters and Scots Guards* to follow him, and galloping off himself with all the mounted men he could collect, entered the town just before General Hunter's arrival. The few armed Boers still remaining on the outskirts of the town† then went off in an easterly direction. Mrs. Steyn, who had been left here by the President with a Government official of the name of Roberts as the representative of the civil power, besides 115 English prisoners, were found by Hunter in Fouriesburg.

But though Hunter had forced his way into the Basin, he had already realised that his task of hemming in the Boers was as yet only half done; Naauwpoort Nek was still open, as well as the postern at Golden Gate. As soon as he was master of the two northern neks, he had detached Colonel Donne with the Sussex and Bedfords and six guns to hold them, and sent back MacDonald with his Highland Regiments, two 5-inch guns, the 5th Battery, and Lovat's Scouts to co-operate with Bruce Hamilton in closing Naauwpoort Nek and Golden Gate. On the following day he sent 300 more mounted men to MacDonald from Fouriesburg, together with Donne's force, which was relieved by Hacket Pain's detachment from Witnek. He brought with him into Fouriesburg Clements's and Paget's troops, the 81st Battery, and Rimington's Guides.

But exits still left for the Boers.

Bruce Hamilton had on the 24th been ordered to give up his position on Spitzkranz and to move to the farm Hebron in a south-westerly direction in order to support MacDonald. The reason for this order is not clear, for though Bruce Hamilton had not found himself strong enough to seize Little Spitzkop, which gave actual command of Naauwpoort Nek, his position on Spitzkranz was a strong one as it commanded the Boer positions west of Liebenbergs Vley and also that on Little Spitzkop. Thus the Spitzkranz position was given up for a day and a half, and though the

July 25. MacDonald and Bruce Hamilton join hands.

* When this force reached Fouriesburg about 6.15, the Scots Guards had marched about twenty-eight miles in eleven and a half hours—a fine performance.

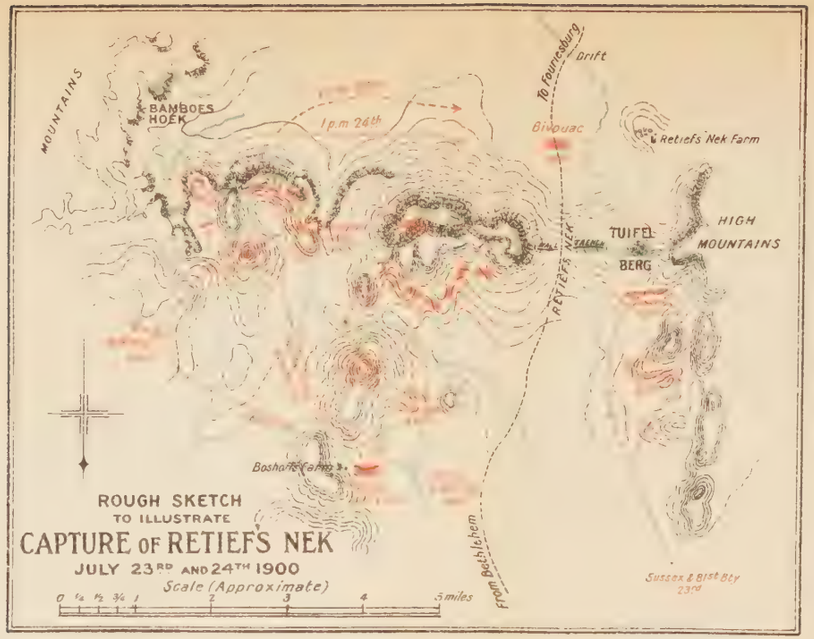
† Prinsloo's main force had remained round Fouriesburg just long enough to cover the retreat of the Ficksburg and Ladybrand commandos from Commando Nek, and had then retired.

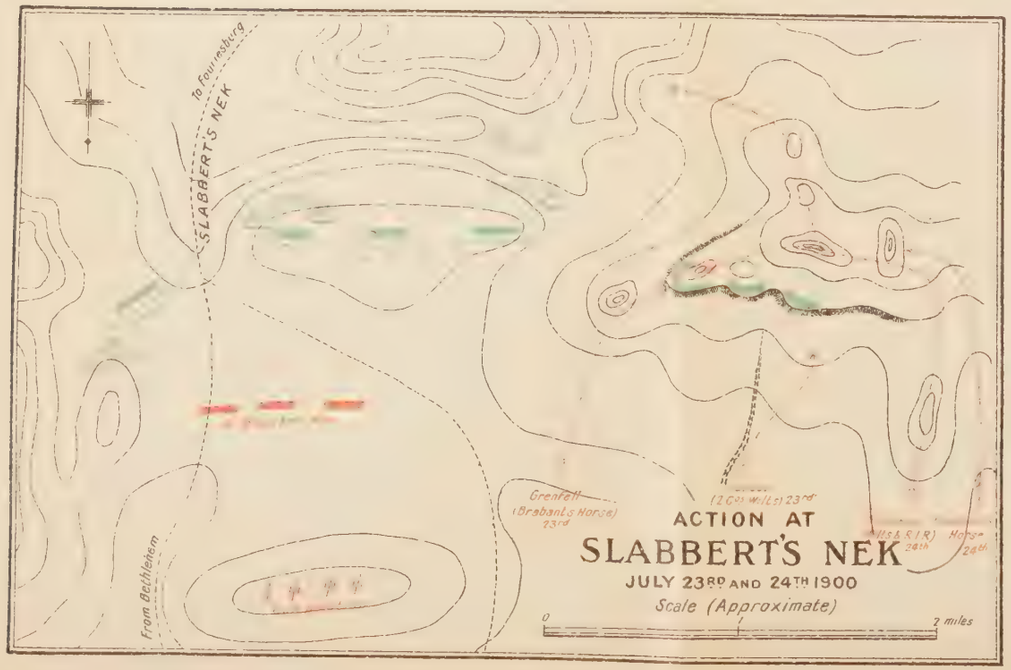
Boers did not reoccupy it, Bruce Hamilton had an extremely laborious march over well-nigh impossible drifts and neks, and on the 26th had almost to retrace his steps. He never actually went so far west as Hebron, but met MacDonald at Middelvley on the 25th. After this MacDonald, being senior, took over the direction of the operations outside the Basin.

July 26. MacDonald and Bruce Hamilton capture Naauwpoort Nek.

Naauwpoort Nek is a long narrow pass flanked by high ridges, which on the north gradually broaden out into an open plain dotted about with kopjes. About four miles from the entrance to the pass the tracks to Bethlehem and Harrismith divide at the farm of David Naudé, where a solitary kopje commands the junction of the tracks. About three miles further north Little Spitzkop and a broad, flat-topped hill above Daval's Rust are marked points of vantage. General de Villiers made the best use of these points of vantage as soon as he found that MacDonald and Bruce Hamilton were working round from the direction of Retief's Nek. The handful of Bethlehem men under Blignaut were sent back to Liebenbergs Vley to obstruct any troops marching round by Spitzkranz. A detachment of the Vrede commando under Strydom were posted on Little Spitzkop, some of the Harrismith men on the David Naudé kopje, while de Villiers held the nek with the larger part of the Harrismith commando, posting a few men under Commandant Truter near Keerom on its western ridge. Commandant Haasbroek with his 400 men was also inside Naauwpoort Nek. On the 26th MacDonald, whose reinforcements had not yet arrived at Middelvley, sent Bainbridge with the 7th M.I. Corps and a company and a half of Lovat's Scouts to work round Spitzkranz and sweep down on Daval's Rust, coming in on the left of Bruce Hamilton, who was to move with the H.L.I., the Black Watch, and the 5th Battery straight across to Little Spitzkop. He himself with the Camerons, Seaforths, the Burma M.I., half a company of Lovat's Scouts, the 82nd Battery, and two 5-inch guns, proposed to seize the David Naudé Kopje; and he sent the 5th Regiment M.I. to Keerom to prevent any leakage from the western side of the nek. When Bruce

DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
Guns





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Hamilton came to Little Spitzkop, the Vrede men had already retreated in a panic to the Daval's Rust Hill, three miles to the south-east. Here they fought a rearguard action with Bruce Hamilton, in order to give their convoy time to trek away eastwards, vacating the position about 3 o'clock. As they retreated the 7th M.I. Corps, who came up on the left after a trifling skirmish with Blignaut near Spitzkranz, and the Burma M.I., who had been sent round to the right flank by MacDonald, made a good attempt to cut off the Boers by galloping round the mountain, but were too late. MacDonald had secured the David Naudé kopje by noon and had driven the Boers, who had been holding it, and Truter's force on his right flank, into the nek. MacDonald's pursuit was, however, not as vigorous as it might have been, and the Camerons, who had been sent forward to a hill nearer the entrance to the nek, were withdrawn just too soon to cut off some of the refugees from Daval's Rust. The Boers were even able to recover a gun which, under pressure of artillery fire, they had temporarily abandoned in a donga. However, by sunset of the 26th, the English had securely blocked every exit from the Basin except the Golden Gate.

July 27. MacDonald waits a day.

After closing Naauwpoort Nek, MacDonald wasted a day before sending troops to seal up the Golden Gate. The Boers made full use of the respite. On the night of the 26th, those at Naauwpoort under de Villiers and Haasbroek left their intrenched positions and moved off inside the mountains towards the Golden Gate, the only force left outside being the Vrede commando under van Hattingh, who marched off in the Harrismith direction. On the 27th MacDonald cleared a few Boers off some kopjes near the nek, but kept Bruce Hamilton at Daval's Rust instead of sending him further east. On the 28th MacDonald left the Seaforths, Burma M.I., two guns of the 82nd Battery, and one 5-inch gun to guard the entrance to the nek at David Naudé's farm, and the Black Watch at Daval's Rust, and marched on with the H.L.I. and the 5th Battery in support of Bruce Hamilton towards the last exit left to the Boers. The way round outside the mountains

July 28. Sends Bruce Hamilton to Golden Gate.

proved a very difficult one, following as it did the lower spurs of the main range and being constantly interrupted by neks and kopjes which the Boers held in successive rear-guard actions. After accompanying Bruce Hamilton a short distance, MacDonald returned to Naauwpoort Nek with his troops, leaving Bruce Hamilton to carry on the movement with a force of only 600 infantry, 250 M.I. and five guns, which was hardly strong enough for the task imposed on him, of brushing aside the enemy and arriving quickly round at the Golden Gate, especially as he was short of ammunition.* Bruce Hamilton had two stiff fights with the Boers at two neks near the farm Sebastopol. On both occasions Colonel Bainbridge's M.I. showed vigour in clearing the Boers off the hills on the left flank, but the brunt of the fighting fell on the Camerons, who had the task of clearing the frontal positions held in some strength. But by this time Prinsloo had surrendered the Boer forces.

Disorganization of the Boers.

As long as the different commandos were holding the passes which had been assigned to them, the difficulties of a divided command had not been very serious. But the entry of Hunter's and Rundle's troops into the Basin and the closing of all exits except one made a consistent and level-headed direction of the Boer retreat indispensable. On the 26th there was only one exit left, and that a bad one, by which the Boer forces in the Basin could escape. It would have taxed all the powers of a de Wet to get his fellow-burghers safely out by such a road; as it was there was absolute chaos. One of the difficulties about the Boer

* Bruce Hamilton, when he parted from MacDonald on the 28th, took on with him the Camerons, the 7th M.I. corps, four guns of the 82nd Battery, and one 5-inch gun, MacDonald taking back with him the H.L.I., Lovat's Scouts, and his battery. On the following day, when the reinforcements ordered by Hunter (see p. 333) arrived at the Nek, the Bedfords and some I.Y. and four guns of the 76th Battery were posted to guard D. Naudé's farm, while the Sussex, the two remaining guns of the 82nd Battery, the 5th battalion M.I., and Burma M.I. were sent to reinforce Bruce Hamilton. These reinforcements, however, did not arrive till the fighting was nearly over on the 29th. MacDonald's Black Watch, H.L.I., Seaforths, and Bedfords made a reconnaissance in force on to the Nek on the 29th, but, of course, found it unoccupied.

military system was that there was no regular hierarchy of commanders, and there was no reason why one more than the other of two *Hoofd-Commandants* who happened to be within the same sphere of action should assume the direction. Roux, it will be remembered, had been appointed *Hoofd-Commandant* of the party designed to follow de Wet out of the Basin, Prinsloo, of another party, to remain behind. Since Roux had been unable to escape, there were now two men of equal authority within the Basin. Marthinus Prinsloo had distinguished himself in the Basuto War of 1866, and was a man of much importance in his district of Winburg, an elder of the church, and rich. At the beginning of the war he had been in command of the Free State contingent in Natal. He did not, however, stay with them at Van Reenen's Pass after Ladysmith, but returned to his own farm, and, being past the age for fighting, retired for a short time. At Lindley he again came to the front, but there his position was ill-defined, and he and Piet de Wet were rivals for the command. At Bethlehem he was left behind in camp during the fighting, but on representations from himself and Haasbroek, both of whom were jealous of Roux's sudden elevation, he was again made a *Hoofd-Commandant* by Steyn in the Brandwater Basin. There is no doubt that, brave personally and patriotic though he was, he was past his work by this time. Paul Roux, a minister at Senekal, and his present rival, was a much younger man. He followed his commando to Natal, and there made himself prominent by useful suggestions about the organization of the forces, and by his devotion in looking after the wounded. After General P. H. de Villiers became disabled at Biddulphsberg, de Wet appointed him *Vecht-Generaal*, and in spite of some jealousy from other commandants he was given his important charge by Steyn in the Basin. He was a man of great courage, but though a stout fighter and a good general, he is said never to have carried a weapon in his hands. On the 27th the Boers realized that they must have one commander-in-chief, so they held a great council of war near Slaapkranz, which lasted from 8 P.M. to 4 A.M., to decide whether it was to be Roux or Prinsloo. Apparently Roux was first chosen,

Dispute as to command.

then Prinsloo came in with some of his adherents and he was chosen. The council also decided that the commander-in-chief should regulate the position of the commandos, and, further, should ask for an armistice in order to have time to communicate with the Free State Government about their present difficulties. Surrender was even hinted at; indeed, on the previous day the Ficksburgers had openly talked of it as the only solution. Later, when the Harrismith and Vrede officers, who were too far off to come to the council, heard the result, they in their turn refused to recognize Prinsloo. As their votes would have given Roux the majority, the uncertainty was as great as ever.

But nothing now made any difference. De Villiers's men, in their flight from Naauwpoort Nek to the Golden Gate, on the 27th, went more like a panic-stricken mob than an army. Each man went on his own way, with nobody to give him orders. The one crying need was for a man to lead this flock. Even Roux, who seems to have been wandering about aimlessly among these men, had nothing better to do than to complain of the number of wagons with the Boers, and to lament that there was nobody in chief command.

July 28. Their last stand at Slaapkranz.

The main body of Boers, after abandoning Fouriesburg, had retired in an easterly direction to the hills between the Caledon and Little Caledon rivers. On the night of the 27th their laager was between Spion Kop and Schoonzicht Kopje, a mile in advance of Slaapkranz Nek, where the roads to Naauwpoort Nek and Golden Gate diverge. On the morning of the 28th Hunter started towards them from Fouriesburg with contingents from Rundle's, Clements's, and Paget's columns. Prinsloo tried to induce the Senekal, Ficksburg and Thaba 'Nchu men to make a stand whilst he personally superintended the retreat of the convoy and guns over the difficult road behind them. When Hunter's troops arrived, Clements, commanding the advance guard of the R.I.R., half a battalion 2nd Wilts and Brabant's Horse, soon drove the Boers off Spion Kop and Schoonzicht, and then from two kopjes further east, which commanded the valley sloping up to Slaapkranz. Slaapkranz Nek itself, to which the Boers now fell back, was a strong position to defend,

somewhat like Alleman's Nek in character, with a conical kopje defending the entrance and difficult cliffs on each side. Rundle's infantry, consisting of the 2nd Scots Guards, the 1st Leinsters and half the 2nd Royal West Kents, supported by a battery, attacked the central kopje, while his yeomanry and Driscoll's Scouts attempted to turn the right flank, and Grenfell's Colonials the left flank. Little progress, however, had been made by nightfall against the Boers' strong position; but then, owing to some confusion of orders, the Senekal men gave up the central kopje and retired towards Naauwpoort Nek. Profiting by this circumstance, Captain H. Bruce Williams, one of Paget's staff officers, led the Scots Guards under Colonel Romilly up the kopje. By midnight the nek was won.

July 29. The Boers surrender.

The panic in the Boer forces was now complete; the English seemed to them to be springing up on all sides; retreating carts, guns, and men were all sticking in the narrow defiles; escape appeared hopeless, as there was no longer any attempt at order or discipline. Mad schemes were proposed, the wildest rumours were afloat; some said that Roberts had been driven out of the Transvaal and that they had only to hold out a little longer as the tide had turned; others that de Wet was at hand to rescue them; others were in the depths of despair, and some of the bravest and sturdiest were to be seen shedding tears of rage. None knew what had happened or what to do. Prinsloo, at any rate, saw that it was hopeless once the Slaapkranz Pass was lost, and early on July 29 he sent a request for a four days' armistice. The emissary he chose was singular; it was Vilonel, the man who had just been sentenced by a court-martial to five years' hard labour for treason. He was one of the young progressives among the Boers and a good commander, but he had never forgiven de Wet for his disgrace before Sannah's Post.* Not long afterwards he had surrendered to Clements in Senekal. Unfortunately, he thought he could induce others to surrender also, and was caught a few days later by the Boers while making the attempt. Since then he had been dragged about after

* See chap. ii., p. 30.

the Boer army, a disgraced man awaiting sentence. Prinsloo probably employed him now because of his previous relations with the English. But his interposition was of no avail, for Hunter refused the armistice and required unconditional surrender, while promising, however, to respect private property. In the course of the day Lord Roberts, who had been kept constantly informed of all occurrences, telegraphed that rifles, guns, and horses must all be given up, and that the burghers must be considered prisoners of war. Hunter informed the Boers of the Field-Marshal's terms, and continued his advance from Slaapkranz. At 4.30 P.M. on July 29 Prinsloo agreed to surrender next morning on the following terms, which were approved by Lord Roberts :—

1. Private goods were not to be confiscated.
2. Horses, wagons, and carts, and all spans of oxen and mules were to be confiscated.
3. Commandos were to be prisoners of war till the peace.
4. All arms and ammunition were to be given up.
5. All Free State property to be confiscated.

In addition, Hunter agreed that every burgher should surrender under his commandant's eye, and that a horse with rations should be provided for each burgher to ride to the appointed place on the railway. But Prinsloo's authority to surrender was not universally recognized. Roux, on the evening of the 29th, went to Prinsloo and told him that he had been finally elected commander-in-chief; for reply Prinsloo showed him Hunter's acceptance of the surrender. Roux adopted the desperate means of going to Hunter's camp and representing to him that the surrender was unauthorized and a mistake. Since Hunter, naturally, could not see it in that light, Roux finally admitted that he was bound by Prinsloo's action. Haasbroek, on the other hand, hearing late at night of the surrender, rushed off to Golden Gate, taking all the men and arms he could with him; he even succeeded in getting away most of the guns by almost impossible paths. In the hurried flight the gun carriages could not be brought over some places; they were therefore abandoned, while the guns, securely bound round with logs, were allowed to slide

Though a party escape through Golden Gate.

down the precipitous rocks. At the Gate he found Van Hattingh and Olivier, who had escaped from Bruce Hamilton, trying to induce the men with them to line the heights and hold the last exit for the others, but in vain, for there was no heart left in them. The utmost they could succeed in doing was to persuade the Vrede and Harrismith commandos and a few stragglers from some of the other commandos to march off with the rescued guns towards Harrismith; a great deal of the ammunition was thrown into the Little Caledon to prevent its falling into the hands of the English. The commandants who escaped from the Golden Gate on the 30th were Van Hattingh, Haasbroek, Olivier, Kolbe, Froneman, Visser, Van Tonder, and Truter, besides P. Fourie and de Villiers, who were already outside the nek. The men who escaped with them numbered about 1,500, and they had seven Krupps, one English gun, two Maxims, and a pom-pom.

But the great majority of the burghers, only too glad to be relieved of the intolerable strain of the last month since they had first begun to be harried by Clements and Paget, surrendered willingly. On the morning of July 30 General Hunter received the surrender of Generals Prinsloo and Crowther and of the Ficksburg and Ladybrand commandos on the appropriately named farm Verliesfontein.* It was a notable scene in a magnificent setting. In the post of honour on the right were the 2nd Scots Guards, opposite them Paget's Munsters; to the south, beyond the Caledon River, stretched the great Basuto mountains; to the north lay Naauwpoort Nek, flanked by the Roodebergen. The surrendering Boers came up between the lines, handing over their rifles and ammunition, in the case of the burghers to private soldiers, in the case of the principal officers to the General in command. There came men of all ages—even boys and old grandfathers—all well armed and well horsed. They had fought well, and now saw no other way of avoiding annihilation; their last remaining anxiety was that they should not be sent to St. Helena.

July 30. Scene of the surrender.

At Slaapkranz the surrender went on quietly for several

* *Verlies* means loss.

July 30–31. Bruce Hamilton fails to catch up Olivier.

days; but Bruce Hamilton outside had not found such ready submission. On the morning of the 30th he was still at the farm Sebastopol, about ten miles from the Golden Gate, when he received orders to cease hostilities. He immediately sent out flags of truce to the Boers gathered outside the Golden Gate on the farm Klerks Vley (Solomon Raath's) announcing General Prinsloo's surrender. Captain Whigham, one of General MacDonald's staff officers, succeeded in passing through Olivier's outposts, and found him some eight miles beyond the pass on the way to Harrismith. Although Olivier promised to stay where he was until he heard news from Prinsloo, he did not keep to his word, but moved on with all possible speed. Bruce Hamilton was then too far off to catch him up, so on the 31st he moved round to Solomon Raath's farm, and there received the surrender of Commandants Du Plooy, Joubert, and Potgieter and of 1,500 Boers who had refused to follow those who trekked away to Harrismith.

The numbers of Boers, etc., surrendered.

It was some time before all the surrenders had come in, and many Boers, even after the majority of their fellows had handed in their arms, lurked about in the caves and recesses of the Basin, of the Langberg, and away in the adjoining long valley called Witzie's Hoek. Several of these were brought out and large stocks of ammunition were destroyed by parties of Yeomanry sent out during the ensuing weeks. Altogether, as a result of the operations, by August 9th, 4,314 men had surrendered, three guns (two of them belonging to "U" Battery) were given in, and the English captured 2,800 cattle, 4,000 sheep, 5,000 or 6,000 good horses, and destroyed nearly 2,000,000 rounds of ammunition.

Criticism.

In the course of this description of the Wittebergen operations an attempt has been made to point out the errors made on both sides. From the English point of view, of course, that which chiefly dims the glory is the escape of de Wet, owing to Hunter's delay at Bethlehem, though it may be said on the other side that if de Wet had been present it is doubtful if the Boers in the Basin would have been brought to book so easily. Again, the escape of the Harrismith and Vrede commandos might conceivably have

DIRECTIONS
British
Boers

been prevented if the intelligence had been better and if MacDonald had not allowed a day to be wasted on the 27th after his success in clearing Naauwpoort Nek.

Nevertheless the Prinsloo surrender was one of the greatest military achievements of the war. When it is remembered that Hunter was working with a staff entirely strange to him, in a country which he had never seen before, and under great physical difficulties in communicating his orders to the various columns under him, the achievement appears all the greater. His final plan for a combined attack on all the passes was admirably conceived and carried out with remarkable exactitude, considering that the operations extended over nearly a hundred miles of country. After the escape of de Wet, his one mistake was in not closing Golden Gate soon enough. On the other hand, although the Boers surrendering here exceeded the number of those who surrendered at Paardeberg, the actual effect on the course of the war was not so decisive. Undoubtedly the most active and determined of the Free State fighters escaped with de Wet and Steyn or Olivier, and those who surrendered included many men already tired of the war. Moreover, while Paardeberg was the turning point in the war, the Brandwater surrender was to the Boers merely an incident which confirmed them in their already fixed determination to fight by guerilla methods rather than in large masses.

CHAPTER X

THE WESTERN TRANSVAAL AND THE RHODESIAN FIELD FORCE

The Western Transvaal and the Rhodesian Field Force.

BEFORE considering Lord Roberts's plan for dealing with the Transvaal Government and the main Transvaal army now stationed on the Delagoa Bay railway, it will be convenient to turn to the events which occurred in the Western Transvaal after Hunter's departure for the east, and to trace the history of the force which had been collected under Carrington in Rhodesia. Both episodes stood out by themselves, and at the same time exercised considerable influence on Lord Roberts's own course of action.

I

June 16. Hunter leaves Barton in charge at Krugersdorp.

Hunter had been summoned from Potchefstroom on the 12th June. Starting on the 16th, he made a rapid march through Krugersdorp with Mahon's and Hart's brigades and reached Heidelberg in time to take command of Hamilton's column. General Barton was left behind as military governor of the whole district from Klerksdorp to Krugersdorp, with no more than half his Fusilier brigade, a battery, and a few mounted troops.

June 17. Hutton opens the way for Baden-Powell from Rustenburg to Pretoria.

On the northern road, Baden-Powell and Plumer, it will be remembered, reached Rustenburg on June 14. One of Lord Roberts's first measures after the battle of Diamond Hill was to send Hutton on June 16 with a column of 1,000 M.I. and infantry and six guns * to open up the road

* 325 M.I. under Major Cradock from Hutton's brigade.
2nd Lincolns under Col. Roberts.
50 Scouts.
18th Battery R.F.A. under Major Scott.

between Pretoria and Rustenburg in co-operation with Baden-Powell, who had sent word that Commandant du Plessis was blocking it at Sterkstroom. After crossing Commando Nek, Hutton met Baden-Powell with an escort of 80 British South Africa Police near Bokfontein. On the 18th Baden-Powell went to report himself at Pretoria with the Lincolns and four of Hutton's guns, while Hutton went north in pursuit of du Plessis. In this he was unsuccessful; but a dozen men of the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles, with three scouts, captured two guns which had been left behind at a farm, and though heavily fired upon, succeeded in bringing them away. On the 20th, Hutton rejoined the rest of his brigade at Derdepoort, where they had been left under Alderson, and Baden-Powell returned to Rustenburg.

Roberts's plan of bringing Baden-Powell north of Pretoria.

After seeing Baden-Powell, Lord Roberts had determined to reinforce him with a brigade of Carrington's Imperial Bushmen from Rhodesia, thus making up the total force at his disposition to about 3,000.* With these troops he was to pacify the district north of the Magaliesberg and to move to Warmbaths, a station a third of the way to Pietersburg on the northern railway. South of the Magaliesberg, Barton's little force was considered sufficient protection.

Apparent tranquillity of the west is deceptive.

But the extraordinary tranquillity with which Hunter's and Baden-Powell's advance had first been received in the west proved very deceptive; for Hunter's back was not turned before indications came of a gathering storm. On June 12 a letter had been intercepted from de Wet to Andries Cronje telling him of his victories on the railway line and suggesting a combined attack on Klerksdorp and Potchefstroom; on the 14th, the Potchefstroom line was blown up at Bank Station, and two days later the telegraph was cut. But such exploits might well be the work of a few daring marauders, for the only organised bands seemed to be the small commandos in the neighbourhood of Rustenburg under du Plessis and Van Tonder. A more serious

* 1st Brigade R.F.F. 1,200
Plumer's force 700
Mafeking Defence Force 700
And 14 guns.

factor was the quiet reorganization of the Boer forces in the west. Immediately after the battle of Diamond Hill, Botha detached Generals Sarel Oosthuizen and H. L. Lemmer with a small body-guard to the north of Pretoria to collect the burghers and re-form the western commandos. Their efforts were most successful, and it only wanted the presence of De la Rey, whose name was one to conjure with in the Western Transvaal, to embolden the burghers to take the offensive vigorously. De la Rey, with the young State Attorney J. C. Smuts on his staff, arrived from the east on July 1.

Description of the country west of Pretoria.

The country to the west of Pretoria, in which from this date to the end of the war De la Rey conducted his campaign, was as well fitted as the eastern Free State for a leader of irregular bands ready to evade or surprise superior forces of regular troops. Even the comparatively level tract south-west of a line drawn from Klerksdorp through Lichtenburg to Mafeking has its convenient undulations. Otherwise from the Vaal northwards up to Rustenburg the country is a succession of almost parallel ridges divided by valleys which become warmer and more fertile as they approach the rich orange and tobacco-growing plain of Rustenburg, each being more exposed to the northern sun and each better protected than the last from the bleaker south. On the border of the Transvaal the Tigerpoort ridges all but form the northern bank of the Vaal between the Mooi River and Vereeniging; next comes the Gatsrand range, and from Johannesburg the Witwatersrand runs out west to Krugersdorp, where it sends out a spur through Ventersdorp and beyond, and itself turns north until it unites with the more northerly Witwatersberg to form the Zwartruggens block of hills which stretches across to Zeerust. Parallel with the Witwatersberg, and divided from it by the Hekpoort valley, the great Magaliesberg range extends for sixty miles west of Pretoria, then takes a sudden turn north until it merges in the Pilandsberg, enclosing Rustenburg in the bend thus formed. The Magaliesberg has many bridle paths over it, but the only passes practicable for wagons are Boschoek Nek, dividing the Magaliesberg from the Pilandsberg, and Magato

Pass in the north-west, Olifant's Nek at the south-west corner, Commando and Zilikats Neks on each side of Hartebeestpoort, which gives the infant Crocodile River its exit north, and, nearer Pretoria, Horn's Nek and Wonderboom Poort. This country, with its fertile valleys which no ravaging seemed to render barren, and the tricky mountain paths and recesses of the Zwartruggens and Magaliesberg, gave De la Rey and his men the supplies they needed and the lurking-places from which to make sudden attacks. Far to the north-west, in the long, hidden kloofs of the Marico district, many of which were never penetrated by a British soldier, the commandos found a secure hiding-place for their wives and children and their booty, and a retreat wherein they could sow their crops and rest awhile from the hard life on commando.

De la Rey in command here.

It was in this country that De la Rey * exercised a practically independent command for the remaining two years of the war. Even when the Boer headquarters were still at Machadodorp with outside sources of supply at their disposal, and Grobler's commando posted at Pienaar's River formed some sort of connecting link between east and west, communication was very difficult across Lord Roberts's position on the Pietersburg railway; later it became still more so. Hence De la Rey from the first had to rely on the country and on what he could seize from the enemy. Accordingly he brought over very few Krupps, which would require ammunition from headquarters, but chiefly English 15-pounders, which he hoped to keep supplied with ammunition by helping himself from British convoys. And De la Rey was quite capable of looking after himself, for, though at first his forces were small, it was calculated that, after his initial successes, ninety-five per cent. of the burghers returned to the commandos west of Pretoria, bringing up their number to about 7,000 men with 12 guns, four pom-poms, and three Maxims.† The backbone of his troops were the Rusten-

* For a sketch of De la Rey's character, see vol. ii., p. 341.

† General De la Rey's forces eventually consisted of the Lichtenburg and Marico commandos under General Lemmer and Commandants Vermaas and Daniel Botha, the Rustenburgers under Commandant

burgers, the softer influences of whose luxuriant country were tempered by their stern Dopper religion and their attachment to the conservative system of their countryman Paul Kruger, and the Krugersdorp commando, whose bleak plateaux seem well fitted to nurture the untiring fighters in whose guardianship was the Paardekraal memorial of the Transvaal's independence.

Secrecy of the Boer preparations.

During the whole of June the Boers kept their preparations in the west secret, and Baden-Powell's and Barton's immunity from attack encouraged Lord Roberts in the belief that he could safely bring the former up to the north of Pretoria. This sense of security had some foundation, for though Baden-Powell, after garrisoning the towns for which he was responsible,* had only 600 men at his disposal at Rustenburg, he was able to chastise Kaffirs in the Pilandsberg and to organise a peaceful service of private transport throughout his district. All pointed to peace, and on July 3 Lord Roberts ordered Baden-Powell, now reinforced with part of Carrington's first brigade of Imperial Bushmen, to evacuate Rustenburg and occupy Commando and Zilikats Neks, preparatory to the move north. Then came the first mutterings of the storm; Lemmer with the Marico and Lichtenburg commandos advanced on Rustenburg and attacked a small force under Major Tracy which Baden-Powell had sent back there as soon as he heard of the danger. Though beaten off from Rustenburg, Lemmer seized the important pass over the Magaliesberg at Olifant's Nek, whereby he established communication with Liebenberg in the Hekpoort valley, and forced Baden-Powell to hurry back to Rustenburg. Even then Lord Roberts did

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Steenekamp and De la Rey himself, the Bloemhof commando under General de Villiers and Commandant Tollie de Beer, the Griqualand West and Bechuanaland rebels under Commandant Visser, and part of the Krugersdorp commando (the rest was with General Viljoen) under Generals Liebenberg and Du Toit. His artillery consisted of three 75 mm. Krupps, seven 15-pdr. Armstrongs, four pom-poms, and three Maxims, and, after Zilikats Nek, of two 12-pdrs. in addition. The Waterberg commando under Generals Grobler and Snyman was also under his orders.

* Zeerust, Ottoshoop, Mafeking, Lichtenburg, and a small post at Elands River, which was a halting-place for convoys to Rustenburg.

not realize the strength and cohesion of the forces which De la Rey had gathered together, but thought the situation could be met by sending the Scots Greys and four guns of "O" Battery from the north of Pretoria to hold Commando and Zilikats Neks, and by bringing up Smith-Dorrien with half a brigade from the lines of communication to clear out the Boers south of the Magaliesberg. On July 9 Lord Roberts still expected that Baden-Powell would be able to bring most of his troops, then distributed between Rustenburg and Ottoshoop, * to Waterval on the Pietersburg line by July 15.

July 11. Four engagements with the Boers.

On July 11 the storm burst. In four separate quarters within a radius of thirty miles of Pretoria, the Boers engaged the English; and the only fight in which the latter had not to give way was that on the east at Witpoort. †

Boer attack on Onderste Poort.

The furthest outpost to the north of Pretoria was at Onderste Poort, in a range of hills a few miles north of Wonderboom. Here the place of the Scots Greys had been taken by the 7th Dragoon Guards with four guns, under Colonel Lowe. Early on the 11th Grobler made a determined attack on them. Dickson, with the 4th Cavalry Brigade at Derdepoort, eight miles to the south-east, had been warned of the intended attack, and sent the 14th Hussars to cover Lowe's right flank. But before they came up Lowe, in spite of the good spirit shown by his men, had been driven back by superior numbers to Wonderboom.‡ Later

* On July 10 Baden-Powell had made the following arrangement for the distribution of his force, part of which, however, was not yet in position:—

Posts.	Men.	Horses.	Guns.
Rustenburg . . .	1,223	1,128	6 12-pdrs., 1 12½-pdr., 2 2·5-in.
Magato Pass . . .	417	400	1 Maxim.
Elands River . .	168	160	1 2·5-in.
Wonderfontein . .	62	12	
Zeerust	229	164	2 7-pdrs.
Ottoshoop . . .	110	75	2 7-pdrs., 1 Maxim.
	2,209	1,939	14 field guns, 2 Maxims.

† See chap. xi., p. 390.

‡ Lowe's casualties on this day were eighteen.

in the day General Marshall came up to take command at Derdepoort, and with the aid of some heavy guns succeeded in checking a further advance of the Boers.

Attack on Zilikats Nek.

Further west, Colonel Alexander with the Scots Greys and four guns of "O" Battery under Major Sir John Jervis had been holding the southern slopes of Commando and Zilikats * Neks since July 7. The two neks being seven miles apart, Colonel Alexander had sent Major Scobell with a squadron and two guns to Zilikats Nek, Captain Maude with another squadron and a machine gun to Commando Nek, and with the remaining squadron and two guns he had taken up a position at Rietfontein, about three miles south of Zilikats Nek, and commanding the bridge over the Crocodile River. On July 10 he received orders to be ready to move off next day with all his cavalry and two guns to co-operate with Smith-Dorrien near Hekpoort; these orders were brought by Colonel Roberts, who marched from Pretoria with five weak companies of the Lincolns to relieve the Greys. On that afternoon Colonel Alexander left his squadrons where they were, and Colonel Roberts took three of his companies to occupy Zilikats Nek, leaving the other two companies and a machine gun at the foot of the nek, as they were too tired to march the seven miles on to Commando Nek that evening. Major Scobell had during the last day or two received several warnings of an intended Boer attack, and had so informed headquarters at Pretoria. When Colonel Roberts came up he found the reports so circumstantial that he sent another urgent message on the 10th to warn Lord Roberts of the danger.

Description of the position and distribution of troops.

The centre of Zilikats Nek is blocked by a small boulder-strewn kopje, to the west of which passes the road, and on each side of it rise up high shoulders of rock that form part of the Magaliesberg chain; a mile further east a foot-path leads over the range from north to south. Major Scobell

* This nek has been variously called Nitral's (a telegraphic error), Uitval, Mosilikatze's, and Zilikats Nek. The last name, which is a shortened form of Mosilikatze's Nek, is the one usually adopted. Its name records the final defeat by the Boers of the Matabele chief, Mosilikatze, before he was driven up north of the Crocodile River.

had posted his squadron about a third of the way up each of the two shoulders, and had placed the guns in a gap on the east of the central kopje. When Colonel Roberts took over the position the Greys were withdrawn behind the kopje, the guns were left where they were, and Colonel Roberts posted one company to take the place of the Greys, another to his right rear to guard against a flank attack by way of the footpath, while he kept the third in reserve under the central kopje with the Scots Greys. It is true that, even including the Scots Greys, who might be moved off at any moment, Colonel Roberts had less than 240 men,* but his dispositions certainly lend themselves to the criticism that he should at all costs have occupied the summit of the shoulders flanking the nek, all the more as the southern slope was without cover and commanded by them, while the northern slope was densely grown over and afforded excellent cover for attack; these summits were obviously even more important than the command of the right rear; further, the guns in the narrow depression had so restricted a field of fire as to be almost useless.

Surrender of the British force.

De la Rey had joined the commandos that had been gathering north of the nek on the same day as the Lincolns arrived on the south, and in the evening he explained his plan of attack. Two parties of 200 each, one of them under his own command, were to start at two in the morning, climb the two shoulders before dawn, and wait for the guns to fire twenty shots before attacking. At 5.30 a sentry noticed Boers on the summit of the eastern shoulder, and gave the alarm by firing his rifle. Colonel Roberts immediately sent off the reserve company to the western shoulder in order to fire across at the Boers on the east, and brought up the company from his right rear and the Scots Greys on to the central kopje. The guns, however, could not be trained on to the right-hand shoulder, whence the main attack came, owing to their cramped position. Unfortunately, also, the signalling-gear had been left in a place exposed to the Boer

* The three companies of the Lincolns were only 30, 40, and 45 men strong respectively, the squadron of the Greys was under 100, and there were a few gunners.

fire, and, in spite of several gallant attempts made to reach it, was not recovered until just before sunset. But about 9 A.M. Colonel Roberts succeeded, in spite of heavy fire on the slope, in getting an order through by a trooper to Colonel Alexander. In accordance with this order Alexander sent his two guns to shell the Boers from the plain below. The effect of this fire, combined with that of the two companies of Lincolns who had been left at the foot of the pass, weakened the Boer attack; but for some reason the guns were withdrawn after less than an hour's firing. Towards mid-day the Boers were reinforced and, supported by their guns on the north, crept up closer and closer on each side of the kopje in the centre of the nek. They drove the company, which had been trying to gain the western summit, from that shoulder to the plain below, and captured the guns in the gap, after shooting down the gunners. The rest of the defenders fought on through the afternoon from the kopje. Still no sign of help came from Colonel Alexander or from Pretoria in response to the previous night's message; De la Rey had already crept round to the right rear, and a small party of sharpshooters had climbed down from the western shoulder to the south of the central kopje. It was obviously impracticable under these circumstances to retire, even at night, across the bare southern slope, which was lit up by a brilliant moon. The Boers pressed closer to the English position; the defenders had over 70 casualties, among the wounded being Colonel Roberts, so shortly after sunset it was decided to surrender. Of the 240 men in the position at daybreak, 17 were killed, 55 wounded, and 189 (including wounded) were taken prisoners; the Boers also captured two guns and ammunition, but they lost somewhat heavily considering their favourable position, among the mortally wounded being De la Rey's adjutant and his nephew. Unsupported as he was,* no blame can be attached to Colonel Roberts for surrendering when he did; whatever blame attaches to him

* When the signalling-gear had been recovered just before sunset communication was immediately opened up with Alexander in the plain below. Alexander's message in reply could not be completed owing to failure of light, but the part which came through held out no hope of further assistance, but merely enquired if Roberts would retire.

is for having failed to occupy the summits on each side of the nek.

Causes of the disaster.

Colonel Alexander was posted three miles off throughout the day; he heard the firing at 6.15 A.M., did nothing until he received the message for the guns about 9 A.M.; he could then see Boers on the eastern shoulder, and gave up the position as lost. Still he allowed the guns to shell the shoulder until they were reported to be in danger; he then withdrew them, and about one o'clock ordered the two companies of the Lincolns left at the foot of the pass to retire also. Beyond this, all he did was to warn Captain Maude to withdraw from Commando Nek without, however, giving him explicit directions to rejoin his own force. Under the circumstances, Maude, thinking that Zilikats Nek was already captured, retired on Pretoria by a road further south. In the evening Alexander marched with his one squadron, his guns, and the two companies of Lincolns, to Pretoria. It is an open question whether, if he had taken prompt action, he could have saved the nek—the temporary success of his guns in subduing the Boer fire from the eastern summit points to the possibility that, if they had remained longer in action, Colonel Roberts might have been able to recapture that important position. At any rate, if he had continued even this support and covered the guns with his own squadron, with the two companies of Lincolns and with Maude's squadron, which should have received early and distinct orders to rejoin him at Rietfontein, he would probably have enabled the defenders to retire with safety.

The delay at headquarters in sending out reinforcements was no less unfortunate than Colonel Alexander's inaction. Apart from the warning previously sent by Alexander, the message from Colonel Roberts explaining the probability of attack was received by the Chief of the Staff on the evening of July 10, but it was not till next day that Lord Roberts heard of it. Pretoria at that time was almost denuded of troops; however, a relieving force of 900 men with six guns, under Colonel Godfray, was collected together and sent off. But they were sent too late, for about 8 P.M. they were still two miles from the nek when Colonel Alexander met them

with the news that the garrison had already surrendered. Accordingly, they returned with him to Pretoria. Thus the ultimate blame for the disaster must be laid on the headquarters staff; in the first place, for allowing such an important position to be so weakly held, in spite of several warnings of the probability of attack by the Boers—for it must be remembered that it was only a chance that the garrison was even as strong as it was, since the Greys and the guns were under orders to move on Hekpoort; secondly, for delay in sending the reinforcements from Pretoria.

Smith-Dorrien's engagement with Oosthuizen at Dwarsvley.

Smith-Dorrien's expedition against the Boers in the Hekpoort Valley, which the Scots Greys had been intended to support, was also unsuccessful on this day. On the 10th the Gordons and Shropshires had arrived at Krugersdorp, and next morning Smith-Dorrien started out north with them and two guns of the 78th Battery and half the 50th Company I.Y., under Sir James Miller, from Barton's force, towards Hekpoort. At Dwarsvley, about ten miles from Krugersdorp, Smith-Dorrien found Sarel Oosthuizen with some Krugersdorpers holding the ridge which closes in the Hekpoort valley on the south. The guns were sent forward to a position between two knolls facing the ridge, but going beyond the knolls, which were to be held by the Gordons, soon found themselves exposed to a deadly fire from a party of Boers who had galloped to a hill only 800 yards away. The gunners displayed great bravery, and the section commander, Lieutenant Turner, although wounded three times, continued for some time to fire one of the guns himself; but all were very soon put out of action. Luckily the Gordons had occupied the two knolls, whereby, as the guns were between the two and only fifty yards to the front, it became impossible for the Boers to take them away. Several gallant attempts were made by the Gordons to bring the guns back to cover. Captain Younger was killed in one attempt, and would have been recommended for a V.C. had he lived; Captain W. Gordon gained his V.C., and Captain Allen also distinguished himself. General Smith-Dorrien's small force was now covering a front of 4,000 yards, and was being attacked on the right flank and right rear as well as in front. The

Shropshires, in widely extended formation, held their ground well, driving off two attacks and making a counter-attack. At 1.25 P.M. a signal message from Krugersdorp conveyed an order from Lord Roberts to give up the enterprise. Thereupon Smith-Dorrien gave the order to retire, but on receiving a signal message from Colonel Macbean that the Gordons could hold on all day, he cancelled the order. After dark the Boers made a charge to get the guns, but were driven off by the Gordons. The guns were then brought away and the whole force marched back to Krugersdorp without molestation. Smith-Dorrien had thirty-five casualties, while the Boers among others lost their commander, Oosthuizen, in their final charge.

The Boers fail to follow up their successes.

On this day things looked very critical for Pretoria itself. On the north, north-west, and west British forces had been driven back, and Pretoria was so unprotected that Lord Roberts was obliged to order up all available troops from the south and to bring back French's cavalry and Hutton's infantry from the south-east.* But, as usual, when they had gained a success the Boers wanted either the organising ability or the dash to follow it up, and Lord Roberts was given breathing space to recover. De la Rey, instead of pressing on, contented himself with leaving garrisons at Commando and Zilikats Neks; then retired to a camp on the Hex River ten miles north of Rustenburg to assist in a half-hearted investment of Baden-Powell in Rustenburg and to prepare for further surprises. But, like de Wet, he was not for long in one place at a time. A week later the Boer forces in the Western Transvaal were widely scattered. Olifant's, Commando, and Zilikats Neks were strongly held; De la Rey himself was at Boschoek Nek, north-west of Rustenburg; another force was at Zwartkopjes, a southern spur of the Pilandsberg; General Lemmer, with 300 men and two guns, commanded the post road to Zeerust at Wysfontein; and Kirsten's scouts were lurking about the Magaliesberg, watching every movement of the English. South of the

* For a fuller account of Lord Roberts's measures to put Pretoria in a state of security and of the delay, which these Boer successes in the west caused him, see chap. xi., pp. 392–395.

Magaliesberg Liebenberg was watching the Potchefstroom line with the Krugersdorp and Bloemhof commandos and the Griqualand rebels under Tollie de Beer, De Villiers, and Visser.

July 18. Roberts sends Hickman along the Magaliesberg and Methuen to Rustenburg.

Lord Roberts, on the other hand, went quickly to work. He used Ian Hamilton's newly-formed division * to clear the north of Pretoria as far as Hamanskraal, until, on the 18th, it was required to support the advance on Middelburg. He then detached Hickman's M.I. brigade to clear Commando and Zilikats Neks and open the road to Rustenburg. At the same time Lord Methuen was brought up from the Lindley neighbourhood with his remaining brigade under Douglas to form a column at Krugersdorp for another attack on Hekpoort and Olifant's Nek, while Baden-Powell was ordered to co-operate with him from the north. Hickman found the Boers holding Commando and Zilikats Neks in strength; he therefore contented himself with marching south of the Magaliesberg as far as Hartebeestpoort, where he crossed over the Witwatersberg and so returned to Pretoria on July 26. Methuen started on the 18th with Smith-Dorrien,† met with some trivial sniping in the Hekpoort valley, and forced his way through 900 Boers and two pom-poms at Olifant's Nek on the 21st. But the success of the movement was marred by Baden-Powell's inability to cut off the Boer retreat. As Methuen came through the nek, most of the Boers retreated east, skirting the foot of the Magaliesberg, out of reach of Baden-Powell, who was separated from them by the river flowing through the pass. Baden-Powell's available strength was small, amounting to barely 400 men, and in spite of the fact that he had previously reconnoitred the nek, he was unprepared for this method of escape.

Methuen had hardly arrived at Rustenburg before he was

* For its composition see chap. xi., p. 394, footnote †.

† The force started in two columns (*a*) under Methuen and Smith-Dorrien, Shropshires, Gordons, 4th F.B., and two pom-poms, with the 3rd, 5th and 10th bns. I.Y. under Lord Chesham; (*b*) under Douglas, L.N. Lancashires, Northumberland Fusiliers, half 3rd S.W.B., four guns 20th F.B., two howitzers, and half squadron I.Y. (The Northamptons and two guns of the 20th Battery were on the road from Kroonstad escorting a convoy.)

ordered south again to stop Liebenberg's train-wrecking attacks on the Potchefstroom line. Recognising, however, the importance of Olifant's Nek, on his own responsibility he posted there the Loyal North Lancashires under Colonel Kekewich, of Kimberley fame. Then on July 23 Baden-Powell was again left to himself, and De la Rey had full opportunity to attack his isolated detachments.

July 23. Methuen recalled south.

On the 22nd Lemmer, near the Selons River, had fallen on a force of 300 Bushmen under Colonel Airey, who were going to fetch in a convoy from Elands River. Colonel Airey's party was surrounded, all their horses were stampeded or shot, and they had thirty-nine casualties. But after fighting all day they were relieved by Baden-Powell, who sent out four separate parties in succession to the rescue. This was followed about a fortnight later by a more serious attack.

July 22. Lemmer attacks Airey near the Selons River.

For several weeks Colonel Hore, with a small garrison at Brakfontein on the Elands River, had been keeping up the connection with Mafeking and Zeerust, policing the district and forwarding on convoys to Rustenburg. At the beginning of August the force which he had for this purpose, as well as to guard a large store of supplies, consisted of 500 men, nearly all Imperial Bushmen or Rhodesians, an old muzzle-loading seven-pounder, and two Maxims.* By this time Lord Roberts had determined that several of the isolated posts in the Western Transvaal such as this one, which were in constant danger of attack, must be evacuated, and on August 1 ordered General Carrington, who had come down to Mafeking from Rhodesia,†

Aug. 4. Col. Hore besieged by De la Rey at Elands River.

* The garrison consisted of—

105	1st	Regt.	Rhodesian Field Force	(New South Wales).
145	2nd	„	„ „ „	(141 Queenslanders, 2 Tasmanians, 2 Rifle Brigade).
51	3rd	„	„ „ „	(42 Victorians, 9 West Australians).

201 Rhodesians and other South African Volunteers.
2 Canadians.
1 Army Service Corps.

505

Artillery: One 7 lb. screw gun, one ·303 Maxim and one ·450 Maxim.

† See p. 377.

to march to Elands River to cover Hore's retirement. But De la Rey, with three detachments of his troops under himself, Lemmer, and Steenekamp, each numbering about 300 men, and each with a gun, a pom-pom, and a Maxim,* had arrived there before him, and on the morning of August 4 had aroused Hore's camp by shell and rifle fire from the north-west, east, and south-east. The camp was on a small boulder-strewn kopje, in the centre of an amphitheatre about five acres in extent, and half a mile east of the river. Most of the men were on this central kopje, but two small hills on the bank of the river were held by detachments under Captain Butters and Lieutenant Zouch. Luckily, an attack had been expected, and stone sangars and shelters of ox wagons had been made and further protected by biscuit-boxes and bags of flour and sugar from the stores the men were guarding. Nevertheless the Boer attack seemed to have every chance in its favour; their guns were in safe positions 2,400 yards from the camp, and along the river banks they could creep up close to the defenders. Hore's old seven-pounder, though it succeeded in silencing a Boer gun for a time and killed a German gunner, was very capricious in its working, and was obviously no match for the Boer guns. The thousands of horses and oxen which were in the camp under no sort of cover were nearly all killed on the first day by the Boer shells; and the stench arising from these dead animals in the narrow camp makes it almost marvellous that the men who escaped the Boer shells were not killed by pestilence. Moreover, the only chance of getting water was to take the water carts down to the river at night, and even then the drivers and escort were not always safe. To make matters worse, on the second day of the siege Carrington's advance scouts, after appearing on the rise to the west, were soon seen retiring again, so that rescue from this side seemed now out of the question.

Carrington had reached Zeerust on August 2, where

* The Boer numbers both in men and guns are variously stated, even by their own side. One authority states that there were never more than 500 Boers with six guns. This may possibly have been the extent of De la Rey's force when he first came up, but before the siege was ended at least 2,000 Boers and several more guns had been gathered round Brakfontein.

he had been joined by the Earl of Erroll's column,* their combined forces amounting to 1,000 men, with six guns and four pom-poms. † When starting he did not know that Hore was invested, so he carried very few rations. But his march was hampered by a long string of empty ox-wagons, with which he was to bring away the stores at Elands River. Consequently he only advanced twenty-two miles on August 3rd and 4th, and on the 5th, having heard on the previous night of Hore's investment, he reduced his force by detaching two parties with four guns at different points on the road to guard the ox-wagons, while he pressed on with the remaining 650 men towards the camp. Lemmer, who was on the north-west position above Brakfontein, moved out with part of the Marico commando and his gun and pom-pom to a strong position on the left of Carrington's advance. Carrington seized one of Lemmer's advanced positions, but found that the Boers were coming up there as well as on his right flank, and that any advance would have to be made over ground devoid of cover; so after an unsuccessful attempt to send a patrol through to Hore, whose camp could be seen two miles off, he determined on retreat. Carrington no doubt had a small force with him, and was badly off for supplies; but his casualties were very slight,‡ he had gained a ridge from which he commanded the way to Elands River, and under the circumstances of Hore's pressing danger, he was too quickly discouraged from a more determined effort to bring out the garrison. It was no doubt a risk, but it certainly seems to have been one of those cases in which a great deal might have been risked without reproach. However Carrington, followed by Lemmer's men, retreated

Aug. 5. Carrington fails to relieve Hore.

* In the early part of July Warren had been directed to send Lord Erroll's Yeomanry to Klerksdorp (see chap. vi., p. 236). But, before Erroll arrived, Klerksdorp had been surrendered to the Boers on the 25th, so after taking away the garrison of Lichtenburg he marched through Ottoshoop to Zeerust.

† Carrington had originally 2½ squadrons of N.S.W. Imperial Bushmen and about 700 details with the 1st N.Z. Battery, while Lord Erroll, besides his four companies of Paget's Horse, had been given two squadrons N.S.W. Imperial Bushmen, one squadron K.M.C., some scouts, and a battery of four pom-poms from the R.F.F.

‡ During the whole day they only amounted to 27.

Carrington retires to Mafeking.

to Zeerust, where it was left to his discretion by Lord Roberts whether he should give up Zeerust and Ottoshoop or retain them, though Lord Roberts evidently inclined to the former course. Carrington decided to retire, and after burning a great quantity of the stores which he was unable to take away with him, reached Mafeking on August 10.

Aug. 1. Ian Hamilton sent west.

From the east another attempt was made to relieve Hore, which proved equally abortive. At the same time that Carrington was ordered to bring in the detachment at Elands River, Lord Roberts had determined to give up Rustenburg and Olifant's Nek, which seemed to him too far away to be anything but a source of weakness, and to content himself with holding Commando and Zilikats Neks, which De la Rey had left with a diminished garrison under Coetzee's command. Accordingly, on August 1, Hamilton was brought over from the east to recapture these two neks and bring away Baden-Powell. Ian Hamilton, being now rejoined by Hickman, had a force of about 6,000 men and 26 guns, which he divided into two columns, sending Mahon's brigade north of the Magaliesberg, and himself marching along the south with Cunningham's infantry and Hickman's mounted troops. Mahon's progress was rather slow, as he had thick bush country to march through, and there were small parties of Boers on the hills, who had to be cleared off, so that by the evening he was still five miles off Zilikats Nek, when Ian Hamilton had arrived in front of it on the south. The communication between the two columns being defective, Ian Hamilton thought Mahon might be in difficulty; on the following day, therefore, he determined to attack at once, so as to relieve any pressure which there might be on him. The nek was carried by infantry attacks of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders on the left, and the Berkshires on the centre and right, supported by the 75th Battery, the 5-inch guns, and the Elswick battery in the centre.* Coetzee's Boers, in spite of their strong position, offered

Aug. 2. He retakes Zilikats Nek.

* The English casualties, chiefly among the Berkshires, were 40; on the previous evening Hickman's mounted troops, who had reconnoitred the Nek, had 6 casualties.

little resistance, and before mid-day were in full flight, while Mahon, who seems to have carried caution to excess on this occasion, was still too far away to cut them off. Commando Nek was found unoccupied, and on August 5 Hamilton's whole force met Baden-Powell outside Rustenburg. On that day firing had been heard in the direction of Elands River, so next day Baden-Powell marched out with his own and Mahon's mounted troops as far as Woodstock on the Selons River, about half-way to Brakfontein. Here he heard guns firing in a westerly direction, but as the sound seemed to grow fainter and fainter, he assumed, without, however, waiting for the reports of his scouts, that Carrington had succeeded in withdrawing Hore towards Mafeking. At the same time a message came through from Lord Roberts directing both Ian Hamilton and Baden-Powell to retire towards Pretoria. Baden-Powell, therefore, returned to Rustenburg. On the following day Lord Roberts heard from Carrington that Hore was still holding out; nevertheless he ordered Ian Hamilton and Baden-Powell to retire on Commando Nek in accordance with the original programme. This decision seems inexplicable. The Field-Marshal no doubt thought that their supplies might not last out for a prolonged expedition, but the country was one in which a mobile force could well pick up enough to live on in an emergency; and if Carrington, who had been reinforced in Mafeking, had at the same time been ordered to fill up his supplies and meet the eastern force, their deficiency could have easily been made good. In that case a successful relief of Hore could hardly have failed to result. As it was, Ian Hamilton and Baden-Powell reached Commando Nek on August 9, after evacuating not only Rustenburg, but also Olifant's Nek.

Aug. 6. Baden-Powell marches towards Elands River, but returns.

Aug. 7. Roberts recalls Ian Hamilton and Baden-Powell to Commando Nek.

During this period General Barton had been nominally in charge of the whole district further south between Klerksdorp and Krugersdorp, with headquarters at the latter place. In addition to the Welsh and Scots Fusiliers, two companies of Yeomanry and part of the Kimberley Mounted Corps left to him by Hunter, he had for a time been reinforced by Captain Grant's two 4·7 in. guns, and momentary

Barton's weak position on the Klerksdorp-Krugersdorp line.

accessions of strength came to him when Smith-Dorrien or Methuen were passing through Krugersdorp. Naturally with such forces his hold on the district depended more on the forbearance of the Boers than on his own power of offensive action. Some useful work was done at Pochefstroom by Major Alan Gough, commanding a detached force of 150 Scots and 150 Welsh Fusiliers, two guns 78th Battery, and forty I.Y., with whom, besides holding the town, he reconnoitred the surrounding country. But it was impossible to prevent attacks on the railway line; and on July 25 Klerksdorp was surrendered without a blow to the Boers by Captain Lambart, although he could have reckoned on a local volunteer force in addition to the detachment of the Kimberley Mounted Corps, with which he had occupied the town six weeks previously.*

Result of two months in the Western Transvaal.

Thus, in the two months from Hunter's and Baden-Powell's first triumphal progress through the Western Transvaal, the British position had grown steadily worse. All the Magaliesberg west of Commando Nek had been abandoned, as well as Rustenburg, Zeerust, and Ottoshoop. Klerksdorp had been lost, and the hold on Potchefstroom itself and on the western railway line was precarious. Moreover, 500 British troops were surrounded by a greatly superior force of Boers, and the Commander-in-Chief himself had abandoned them to their fate.

Roberts's over-confidence.

The chief lesson to be learned from this series of episodes is that here, again, Lord Roberts suffered from the over-confidence and want of a consistent policy, in dealing with conquered territory, which he showed in the Free State after the capture of Bloemfontein. Misled by a temporary calm, he allowed too many places to be held by insignificant numbers. In consequence, when the garrisons had to be either withdrawn or to surrender, far more damage was done to the prospects of peace by what seemed a reverse to British arms and an abandonment of loyalists or surrendered Boers than if the work of occupation had been postponed to a more complete suppression of the Boer forces in the field. Lord Roberts, indeed, never realized how little the Boers were impressed by the

* See chap. vi., p. 225.

occupation of towns, and how very much they were elated by their abandonment.

II

December, 1899. Anxiety of the Chartered Company about Rhodesia.

Very early in the war the Board of the British South Africa Company became seriously concerned as to the danger which Rhodesia was running in its comparatively unprotected state. Although most of the able-bodied men of the country were in arms and had enrolled themselves either in the Rhodesian Volunteers or in one of the regiments raised by Baden-Powell and Plumer, yet these regiments were principally employed outside the borders of their own colony, which might therefore find itself with very little means of resistance against the expected Boer invasion.* The colonists themselves, though not perhaps so impressed with the danger as the directors in London, showed some signs of nervousness both with regard to the Boers and to a possible Kaffir rising.

The War Office first refuse, then sanction a Rhodesian Field Force in January, 1900.

Accordingly, in the first week of December the Company addressed a letter to Mr. Chamberlain urging that a force, to be paid by the Imperial Government, should be raised for the protection of the country, and they returned to the charge ten days later. The letters were passed on to Lord Lansdowne, whose military advisers decided that it would be unwise to send a force to Rhodesia on the ground that the pressing military need was for a concentration rather than a further dissipation of forces. However, three weeks later the Secretary for War had already entered on the course of delegating some of his functions to volunteer committees, and yielded to renewed pressure from the Company, who offered to relieve the War Office of the business of enlisting and equipping the men and of procuring all necessary stores, so that the Government would have nothing to do but to pay the bill. On these terms it was agreed that a force of 5,000 mounted men should be raised, together with three field and two pom-pom batteries, it being understood that some of the men would be obtained in Rhodesia and all outside England.

* See chap. vi., p. 201.

Energetic preparations by the Chartered Company.

The War Office letter of approval came to the Board of the Chartered Company on January 11, 1900, and forthwith all was bustle and energy. They immediately began the purchase of horses, mules, and wagons in South Africa, and set to work buying equipment and guns in England. The Administrators of Mashonaland and Matabeleland, Mr. Milton and Captain the Hon. A. Lawley, were instructed to make preparations for the troops. The brunt of this work naturally fell on Mr. Milton, who, besides being senior Administrator, was nearer to the point where it had been decided to bring in the troops; but both did everything that was possible. The limited number of wagons procurable in the country were bought, large supplies of grain were laid in, and slaughter cattle were imported from Bechuanaland and Barotseland; store-sheds for wood and forage were built, and drifts put in order along the probable lines of march, and at Marandellas,* close to Salisbury, a large standing camp was made ready as a base. Before the end of January the commander of the force had been appointed and he had sent in his proposals for his staff; by the first week in February the Company had purchased the equipment for 5,000 men with guns and had even shipped part of it, and they confidently expected that the whole force would be on the frontiers of the Bechuanaland Protectorate by the end of May.

Difficulties begin as to the passage of troops and warlike stores by Beira.

But this initial rapidity of progress very soon came to an end. The first difficulty which appeared was about the method of getting the force to Rhodesia at all. There was, it is true, not much choice of ways, because those through the Transvaal and Bechuanaland were obviously closed, and the only way left was through Beira. But, unfortunately, by going to Beira the troops would have to pass through 200 miles of Portuguese territory before they reached Umtali in British territory. Under ordinary circumstances it would have been a distinct breach of neutrality on the part of Portugal to allow the passage through her territory of troops whose obvious destination was a country friendly to herself. It is true there

* Marandellas was chosen as the base in preference to Salisbury, as the road thence to Buluwayo is shorter, comparatively well watered, and contains fewer drifts.

was the apparent precedent of Alderson's Mashonaland Field Force, which had been allowed through in 1896, but the case of warfare against a savage tribe is not altogether on all-fours with that against a civilised Power. However, the circumstances were somewhat peculiar. In 1891, as the result of a boundary dispute between England and Portugal, a treaty had been made by which each Power obliged itself to facilitate through certain parts of its own territory the passage of the goods and subjects of the other Power; and it is specifically stated in the 12th Article of this treaty that "The Portuguese Government engages to permit and to facilitate transit for all persons and goods of every description over the waterways of the Zambesi, the Shiré, the Pungwe [on which Beira stands], the Busi, the Limpopo, the Sabi, and their tributaries, and also over the landways which supply means of communication where these rivers are not navigable." Still, wide as these terms are, they would hardly have been wide enough to cover the passage of troops in time of war had it not been for certain explanations exchanged between the two Governments at the time the treaty was made. The English Foreign Office, therefore, relying on the mutual explanations of this clause and on the exceptionally friendly relations entertained with Portugal, claimed permission to land troops and warlike material at Beira. But, in spite of their goodwill, there was considerable delay before the Portuguese authorities were willing to give the required permission; and it is hardly surprising that it should have been so, for they were naturally not anxious to do what was certain to be regarded by the Transvaal Government as a breach of neutral duty. For a long time the form of government at Beira gave them an easy excuse for dilatory tactics, as Beira and the surrounding provinces are not directly under Lisbon, but are governed by the Royal Mozambique Company, whose relations to the Royal Government are very much what those of the British South Africa Company are to the Imperial Government. Thus the Governor is appointed by the Company, but in all matters of external relations with foreign administrations he has to take his orders from the Governor-General at Lourenço Marques, who in his turn can

hardly do anything without instructions from the Government at Lisbon. Luckily for the English the Company's Governor at Beira, Visconde Moirelles do Canto e Castro,* was extremely friendly, and his good dispositions were admirably encouraged by Lieutenant-Colonel Arnold, the official representing the English shareholders' interests in the Company,† and by the British Consul, Mr. McMaster. The Delagoa Bay authorities, on the other hand, for very natural reasons, as has been explained in a previous volume,‡ were at first distinctly anti-English in their leaning. The Transvaal Government naturally did all in their power through their Consul, Mr. Pott, to support the Governor-General in his bias against their enemies, and, further, sent an official in February to watch the passage of stores through the Beira Custom-house.§ Hence it was only by extreme goodwill on Moirelles's part, in the early stages of the war, that any stores destined for the troops in Rhodesia were allowed through, while the passage of arms or troops, until distinct orders came from Lisbon, was obviously out of the question. From the first the Chartered Company had pointed out the urgency of getting this point as to the passage of stores, arms, and troops settled, as they were anxious to have the stores landed in readiness for the troops. But the Foreign Office appear to have been slow in pressing their claim at Lisbon, and it was not till March 22 that orders at last came to Moirelles which enabled him to pass everything.‖ This,

March 22. Permission is obtained to use the Beira route.

* Now K.C.M.G.

† Colonel Arnold was seconded from the Army to enable him to hold this semi-diplomatic appointment.

‡ See vol. iii., p. 102.

§ This official, Mr. Buytendorf, stayed at Beira for some time, but the only suspicious articles he succeeded in detecting were some empty sacks, which he protested against on the ground that they would be used for fortifications.

‖ On the 8th March the Portuguese Government communicated to the Transvaal the following note:—

"The Portuguese Government has just been informed that in accordance with the mutual explanations exchanged in the treaty of 1891 with regard to the right of moving troops and material of war through the Portuguese territory in South Africa into English territory and *vice versâ*, the British Government has just made a formal demand for all troops and material of war to be sent through Beira to the English hinterland. The

it will be noted, was ten weeks after the expedition was sanctioned.

Difficulty about enlistment of the men. The final composition of the R.F.F.

The second hitch which occurred was as to the enlistment of the men. Originally the directors of the Chartered Company suggested that a certain proportion of the men could be raised in Rhodesia, but they soon found that there were not many left there available for enlisting. They then sent a confidential agent to make enquiries for men in Canada and the United States. But happily the Government, who in the first instance had made the Company responsible for procuring the men, discovered the inadvisability of this unofficial recruiting, and determined to send Imperial troops chosen from among the Yeomanry and the Australian contingents. However, it was not before March 2 that they made known to the Company their decision that the recruiting agent in Canada should be recalled. The force, as finally chosen in the same month, was the 17th Battalion I.Y.,* under Colonel St. Leger Moore, and the 18th Battalion † of Sharpshooters, under Colonel Parke, a corps attached to the Imperial Yeomanry and composed of men specially selected for their shooting capacities; the remainder of the force consisted

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Portuguese Government cannot refuse this demand and must fulfil a convention depending on reciprocity, a convention which was settled long before the present state of war had been foreseen. This agreement cannot be regarded as a superfluous support of one of the belligerent parties or as a violation of the duties imposed by neutrality or indeed of the good friendly relations which the Portuguese Government always wishes to keep up with the Government of the South African Republic."

The Transvaal Government, in its answer of the same day, protested that the treaty of 1891 had not been made public and that no notice of it was received by the Transvaal at the outbreak of the war. It could therefore not be applied in this case, and in any case as war had begun such a treaty could not be applied by a neutral State to the disadvantage of third parties. The fact of neutrality had suspended the working of the agreement, just as it suspended Article 6 of the treaty which the Transvaal had made with Portugal, which was published and even approved by the British Government. The action of Portugal would put her in the position of an enemy instead of a neutral ally, wherefore the Transvaal protested strongly against the measure.

* 61st Co. (2nd Dublin), 60th Co. (3rd Belfast), 50th Co. (2nd Hants), 65th Co. (Leicestershire).

† 67th, 70th, 71st, 75th Companies.

of 2,150 Australian, Tasmanian, and New Zealand Bushmen, and a corps of 1,850 Imperial Bushmen, specially recruited at Mr. Chamberlain's request from the same colonies*. With this force only about fifty trained gunners, including officers, were sent to serve the guns purchased by the Company. The official designation of the force was the Rhodesian Field Force.

General Carrington appointed to command.

No fault can be found with the promptitude of the War Office in appointing the commander and staff for the Field Force, although their selection proved a greater difficulty than that of the men. By January most of the superior officers on the War Office lists were already in full employment, so that the choice was not very large. However, as it was imperative to appoint the general early to enable him to collect his staff and supervise his arrangements, before the end of January, the command was given to Sir Frederick Carrington, K.C.B., K.C.M.G. This general had already a considerable experience of South African warfare, and had distinguished himself in several early expeditions, chiefly as a bold leader of mounted forces; more recently, however, he had not displayed special capacity when in command of the forces for suppressing the Matabele and Mashona rebellion. But as Plumer was considered too junior in rank for so important an appointment, and at the same time the Company insisted on the importance of having a man who would work without friction with the local men, Sir Frederick Carrington's previous experience of Rhodesia and his personal popularity seemed to mark him out as meeting these conditions most suitably, although the choice was not unreservedly approved by the military advisers of the War Office. Lieut.-Colonel Jenner, D.S.O., of the Rifle Brigade, was appointed chief of his staff, which also numbered in its ranks Colonel Raleigh Grey, C.M.G., who had taken part in the Raid, Lieut.-Colonel Carew, D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel Wright, R.A., and Major Paris, R.M.A.

April–May. Carrington's first duty to send a Canadian battery to Plumer.

However, the chief difficulties seemed to have been cleared away when Carrington and his staff embarked in the *Aurania* about the middle of March; his Yeomanry

* See vol. iii., p. 35.

followed in the *Galeka* on April 6, and the first contingent of Bushmen were already at Beira on the 11th of that month. Two days earlier Carrington and his staff had landed at Cape Town. Here he found that his most pressing duty was to assist Plumer in the relief of Mafeking. But Plumer's chief need was for more guns, and though Carrington had guns, he had no gunners; consequently the immediate despatch of a battery from his own force seemed out of the question. Fortunately, C Battery of the Royal Canadian Artillery happened to have just arrived at Stellenbosch; and Lord Roberts at once determined that Carrington should take that on to Beira. It also happened most opportunely that Mr. Zeederberg, the great contractor for coach services in South Africa, was in Cape Town at the time; he engaged to transport the battery as quickly as possible over the road between Marandellas and Buluwayo * by suspending the coach service and collecting all his mules in Rhodesia for this stage of 285 miles. The rapid journey of this battery is an incident of Carrington's expedition deserving unreserved praise. The battery sailed from Canada under the command of Major Hudon on February 21; it disembarked at Cape Town on March 26, was sent on April 4 to Stellenbosch, which it reached next day; on the 13th it marched back the twenty-six miles to Cape Town, and embarked with Carrington and his staff on the *Colombian* at 8.30 A.M. on the 14th. The ship arrived at Beira on April 21; by the 24th the battery had disembarked, and with an escort of 100 Queenslanders was at Marandellas on the 27th. Here it was decided to send only four guns immediately, to be drawn by Mr. Zeederberg's mules; the other two were to follow more slowly with horses; the gunners and drivers for the four guns and their escort were to travel in the coaches also provided by Mr. Zeederberg. The whole of the first two sections were sent off between April 30 and May 2, and all had arrived at Buluwayo by May 7. On the 9th they entrained again, and reached Ootsi on the 11th; thence they immediately trekked off the forty miles to Plumer's camp

* The railway between Salisbury and Buluwayo had not then been made.

at Sefetili and arrived there early on the 14th.* This rapid march enabled Plumer to join Mahon with a safe complement of guns in time for the relief of Mafeking †; and it reflects great credit on the men who performed the journey and on General Carrington and Mr. Zeederberg for organising it so smartly.

Further difficulties. The block of stores.

But after this initial success the history of the next few months of the Rhodesian Field Force is nothing but a depressing record of delay and disappointment. The Company had been anxious that all the stores and equipment should be landed and conveyed up country before the men arrived, so as to avoid a block on the railway; but this had not been possible, owing partly to the delay of the Foreign Office in removing the obstacles to the passage of troops and stores through Portuguese territory, partly to the difficulty in chartering steamers and in ensuring that they should be reasonably punctual when they had started. The consequence was that during April and May there was an unmanageable mass of men, horses, stores, and arms creating confusion at Beira and obstructing the single line of railway.

The difficulty about the railway.

The railway, indeed, proved the greatest of all difficulties. Alderson in 1896 had found a narrow-gauge railway which carried his column the 149 miles from Beira to Chimoio. Since that time it had been completed for the whole distance of 370 miles from Beira to Salisbury; but, unfortunately, in the early part of 1900 it was in a state of transition from the narrow gauge of two-and-a-half feet, at which it had been originally laid, to the broader three-and-a-half feet, which is the normal gauge in South Africa. This railway, in Portuguese territory, belonged to the Beira Railway Company, a daughter company of the Chartered, but during its period of reconstruction was leased to the contractors, Messrs. Pauling, whose manager, Mr. Lawley, had given assurances that the broadening of the gauge would be completed by the end of March. This, however, had not been done, partly owing to

* The four guns had covered 1,120 miles in 21 days, between April 24 and May 14—viz.:—335 miles to Marandellas by rail, 285 miles to Buluwayo by road, 460 miles to Ootsi by rail, 40 miles to Sefetili by road.

† See chap. vi., p. 208.

floods in February, partly owing to mismanagement; and for the sixty miles between Beira and Bamboo Creek the line was still on the narrow-gauge system. Even this would not have mattered so much if there had been a sufficiency of rolling-stock on the broad-gauge line, or if the troops had been kept on board ship or even at Beira until there was train accommodation at Bamboo Creek. As it was, partly from fear of incurring demurrage charges, partly from the impatience of commanding officers, the ships were unloaded as soon as they could be at Beira, and men and horses were taken as fast as possible by the narrow-gauge line to Bamboo Creek, or even no farther than a station called Twenty Three Mile Peg; at these places, not the least unhealthy in a low-lying, pestilential country, men, stores, and horses had to remain jumbled up together until the limited rolling-stock of the broad-gauge line could convey them to the healthier highlands of Umtali or Marandellas. Nor was all trouble at an end even when a train had appeared. The railway staff was quite inefficient, the drivers were sometimes drunk, and the trains often left the metals or stopped for want of fuel or water.* It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the Queenslanders took from April 13 to May 23 to reach Marandellas, the base in Mashonaland, while one of the Yeomanry companies was kept from May 12 to the 23rd at Twenty Three Mile Peg, from the 24th to the 29th at Bamboo Creek, and from May 30 to June 25 at Umtali. The men were good enough, as they subsequently proved at the defence of Elands River and at other engagements, but they sickened and lost heart in their unhealthy camps, where they felt they were being wasted; and, though the ill effects did not always appear till they had reached the sudden change of climate at Umtali, in the middle of June the percentage of sickness among the Yeomanry, who had been doing nothing for over a month, was as high as 50 per cent., and there had already

* The manager of the railway, Mr. Lawley, may have been a good contractor, but he does not seem to have had the necessary experience for running a railway in time of stress. The Company would certainly have been well advised if they had accepted the suggestion made by their senior Administrator, Mr. Milton, to supersede him by a really experienced railway man.

been twenty-two deaths. There would probably have been less delay, and certainly less sickness, if the troops had marched up country as soon as they arrived either at Umtali or at Bamboo Creek, which was very much what Alderson's force had to do in 1896, leaving the stores to be brought up by the railway.

The supply of stores.

The supply of stores was also a source of trouble. In the first place, the arrangement whereby the Company purchased stores independently of the Army, was found to be unsatisfactory, for the military authorities at Cape Town had reason to complain that enhanced prices resulted from the Company bidding against the Army Supply Departments, as the War Office had experienced with the Yeomanry committees in England. Consequently, on May 28 the War Office relieved the Company of this duty. Theoretically, the arrangements at Beira and along the line for handling the stores were as good as could be expected under the peculiar circumstances. It must be remembered that military supervision of stores was almost impossible in Portuguese territory, as it was inadvisable to have a body of officers quartered there larger than was absolutely necessary. It had therefore been decided that the Company should be responsible for all stores until they reached Marandellas. At Beira Lieutenant Masterman, A.S.C., was acting in the dual capacity of representative of the Company for stores, and base officer of the Rhodesian Field Force for lines of communications; all stores, on landing, were sent up country by Pauling's, as agents of the Company, or taken over on receipt by Lieutenant Masterman for issue to any troops who landed without rations or equipment.* It is, perhaps, hardly to be wondered at that, in view of the peculiar difficulties as to supervision, there was a considerable leakage of stores. Equipment was ordered for 5,000 men, but half the men were already armed, so that there was no obvious need for rigid economy. Moreover, owing to the not infrequent accidents on the line, or in order to lighten a train, stores

* Some of the troops had been sent off without arms or equipment of any sort, as the Company had arranged to have equipment and arms for 5,000 men in Rhodesia.

would be dumped down alongside the railway. Consequently guns, saddlery, or other equipment urgently required at headquarters could not be found, while passing troops would help themselves to what they required without any troublesome formalities. Later Marandellas became overstocked with military stores, but, owing to inadequate supervision, for which there was no longer the same reason, the waste there also was considerable.

Carrington's inaction.

The most surprising part of the whole business was General Carrington's own inaction. It is true that from the first he had expected the railway to prove inadequate for the rapid conveyance at one time of so large a force, and had urged the detention of the transports at the healthier port of Durban, whence they could come up singly to Beira.* But on finding this appeal unsuccessful he seems to have taken no action, beyond writing complaints, to remedy the intolerable delays on the railway. On April 24 he and his staff started with a detachment of the Canadian Battery from Beira, and travelled as fast as they could to Marandellas.† Once there, he did not return to see for himself the cause of delay in Portuguese territory‡ or to hasten matters by some personal persuasion; at such a crisis a general of energy and determination would certainly have had the curiosity to find out by personal inspection how his troops were faring in the unhealthy country he had left, and under the circumstances might even have acted as his own railway staff officer, if he could not obtain at once a better manager than Lawley. The work of organizing the brigades and batteries as the men dribbled up to Marandellas was no doubt important, but that might well have been left to his subordinates, Colonels

* Carrington had not only urged this in the first instance, but on finding when he arrived at Cape Town that there was already a block at Beira, he had persuaded the High Commissioner to have a gunboat sent to intercept the remaining transports. Unfortunately the gunboat missed the transports.

† It is true that, though Carrington had special facilities, he travelled at a rate of only seven miles an hour. On another occasion a native was accidentally dropped from a train, but he caught it up after walking twenty-five miles.

‡ After arriving at Marandellas he never returned farther east than Umtali, where he inspected some Yeomanry on June 10.

Carew, Grey and Wright, in favour of the far more important work of bringing the men out of their noisome camps down country. It is, indeed, hardly possible to imagine that if Carrington had verified for himself the state of affairs on the railway, he would have refused General Forestier Walker's offer of June 14 to have all the remaining troops at Beira sent round to Cape Town to be railed up from there; for, a month after this refusal, there were still 524 men on the line.

The Chartered Company not free from blame.

But General Carrington's want of energy cannot absolve the Chartered Company from their share of responsibility for this unfortunate mismanagement. The expedition was primarily authorised at their urgent request and for the defence of their own territory. It is true that their stipulation as to stores being landed before the men arrived was not fulfilled owing to the Government's failure to obtain the requisite permission from Portugal until March 22; but quite apart from this fact, the mismanagement of the railway by their agents was the chief cause of all the sickness and delay. The non-completion of the broad gauge by the time anticipated may not have been their agents' fault, but it is a remarkable fact that when at last the work was undertaken on July 5, it was completed in three days. Then it was too late. But what is of more importance is that in February the manager of the Company, basing his calculations on the existing break of gauge, assured the War Office that at the most it would take seven weeks to carry 5,000 men, 7,000 animals, and 3,100 tons of stores from Beira to Salisbury, and that if, as he confidently expected, the gauge was made uniform throughout before the troops arrived, it would take less time. As a fact, although the first ships arrived early in April, the whole force had not left the railway three months later.

The part of the Government.

The Government can perhaps hardly be blamed for divesting itself of full responsibility for the expedition under the peculiar circumstances at the beginning of 1900, when the War Office was suddenly called upon to provide an army twice as large as the nation had ever before thought necessary. But before doing so the Company's sanguine estimate of the capacity of the railway should have been

more closely scrutinized. On this point it cannot be said that they were without warning, for in the previous year Lieutenant-Colonel Arnold had reported what its real carrying power was. Moreover they should have satisfied themselves that everything was done to ensure the success of the undertaking by regulating the sailing of the transports, and by the appointment of a commander in whom they themselves had full confidence.*

Distribution of R.F.F. into brigades and batteries.

As soon as the men composing the Rhodesian Field Force came up to Marandellas they were drafted into brigades and were then gradually sent off to Buluwayo, 285 miles further. This journey also had its difficulties, for the supply of transport animals and wagons was so limited that only 200 men could be moved at a time, and they required nearly a month for the journey. The 1st Brigade formed under Colonel Carew was composed as follows:—1st Regiment—N.S.W. Bushmen; 2nd Regiment—S. Australian Bushmen, Tasmanian Bushmen, Queensland M.I.; 3rd Regiment—Victorian Bushmen, W. Australian Bushmen. This brigade, which amounted to about 1,200 men, was at Buluwayo by June 12. The 2nd Brigade under Colonel Raleigh Grey was constituted of the 4th Regiment—New Zealand Bushmen, the 5th Regiment—New Zealand Imperial Bushmen, and the 6th Regiment—N.S.W. Imperial Bushmen. This brigade, 900 strong, had reached Buluwayo by July 4. The rest of the Field Force, composed of the two Yeomanry battalions and of three squadrons of the Victorian Imperial Bushmen, having been delayed longest on the Beira railway, had not reached Buluwayo before the beginning of September. The 476 men who formed the last contingent of Imperial Bushmen, and had not arrived at Beira in the *Manhattan* before May 30, were sent to land at Durban, owing to the block on the railway, and were never attached to the Field Force.

* The neglect of this expedition by the home authorities is illustrated by the fact that as late as June, 1900, an urgent letter was sent over from a high military official of the War Office to the Chartered Company, inquiring as to the exact locality of Bamboo Creek, where British troops had been stationed for a couple of months, and which since the beginning of the year the War Office knew to be a difficult point on the railway.

The artillery originally proposed for the force was to consist of three batteries of Armstrong q.f. 15-prs. and two four-gun pom-pom batteries, all under Colonel Wright. But as the last four guns of the third Field Battery only reached Beira on August 10, too late to be of any use in Rhodesia, they were sent round by sea to Cape Town. For the four remaining batteries there were no gunners, and only a small nucleus of artillery officers and a few details from an ammunition column available, so that volunteers from the Australasians and Yeomanry had to be trained to serve them. The first battery, which was formed at Marandellas at the end of May, under the command of Major Powell, was entirely manned by a squadron which volunteered in a body from the New Zealand contingent. This battery, under the name of the 1st New Zealand Battery, did considerable service in the Western Transvaal, where it formed part of General Carrington's force, and was then broken up into sections. The guns of the 2nd Battery reached Marandellas at the beginning of July, and by August 22 Major Paris had trained his complement of gunners and brought it down to Ottoshoop. The two guns of the 3rd 15-pdr. Battery were left in Rhodesia under the command of a Colonial officer. The 1st pom-pom Battery, under Major Gosling, was attached to Lord Methuen's force; the 2nd, under Major Giles, remained in Rhodesia.

Object of the R.F.F. to make an attack on Pietersburg. Reasons why it was not effected.

The really valuable service which the Rhodesian Field Force could have rendered to Lord Roberts would have been to make a descent from the north on Pietersburg; had this been done, the Boers would have been deprived of a valuable base which they enjoyed for another year, and the co-operation of troops from the north during the lengthy and difficult operations along the Delagoa Bay railway would have been of inestimable use. Lord Roberts himself realised this very clearly, and during the battle of Diamond Hill telegraphed to Carrington asking him when he could be in Pietersburg, and a little later, when he was at more leisure, explained to him what he regarded as the objects of his force; these were to demonstrate so as to threaten the Boers from the north, and prevent their retreat northwards, to safeguard

Rhodesia against native risings, and to win over to the English side the numerous natives of the Zoutpansberg. To effect the last two purposes it was quite sufficient to have troops marching about the country; the first two he wished Carrington to secure by placing 500 men at Baine's and Rhodes Drifts and by advancing with 1,200 men to Pietersburg; a larger force would be impracticable owing to scarcity of water; the rest of the force was to go to Mafeking. In answer to Lord Roberts's first telegram Carrington engaged to be at Pietersburg by July 25. This would have been quite possible if the 1st Brigade, concentrated at Buluwayo since June 12, had been sent to Tuli. But as it was on the point of starting, Roberts ordered it down to Mafeking to strengthen Baden-Powell.* Carrington then sent off the 2nd Brigade by detachments towards Tuli, which is 150 miles distant from Buluwayo, and by the 18th 900 men and a battery were on their way thither. Then again Lord Roberts countermanded the expedition and ordered Carrington to concentrate all his troops at Mafeking.

Thus by August the only part of the Rhodesian Field Force left in Rhodesia were the two guns of the 3rd 15-pdr. Battery, four pom-poms, the two battalions of Imperial Yeomanry (17th and 18th), and three squadrons of Victorian Imperial Bushmen. In July the Leicestershire Yeomanry (65th) were employed on a small punitive expedition against the native chief M'Pondera in the north in co-operation with some of the British South Africa Police. Otherwise the troops in Rhodesia had no work of any importance during Carrington's absence in the Transvaal.

Sept.–Oct. Carrington at Tuli.

Carrington's own operations in the Western Transvaal during August have already been described.† On September 1 Methuen had taken up his permanent post in the Western Transvaal, and Carrington was ordered back to resume command of the troops still in Rhodesia, leaving his 1st and 2nd Brigades in the Transvaal. He then decided to attempt another forward move from Tuli into the Northern

* See above, p. 348.

† See above, pp. 358–9, and also chap. xii., pp. 428, 431.

Transvaal.* However, before anything was done, elaborate preparations were undertaken by reconnaissances of the road as far as the Brak River in the Transvaal, and by arranging for the transport of stores from Palapye to Tuli and the Limpopo by wagons hired from Khama; this service proved defective, owing to difficulties with Khama, and sickness among the oxen. These preparations took so long a time, that for another two months no advance was made, and towards the end of October the Yeomanry at Tuli were still improving their marksmanship by firing at screens, and practising dismounted drill under the general's eyes. Finally on October 26 Carrington crossed the Limpopo into the Transvaal with one squadron. He stayed there for over a week and received satisfactory assurances from the native tribes. Then again Lord Roberts stepped in and ordered the Yeomanry and four guns to De Aar. The situation in Cape Colony was beginning to cause renewed anxiety, and useful as the diversion to Pietersburg would have been, Lord Roberts could not afford to wait any longer. After that, beyond keeping an observation post at Tuli, the Rhodesian Field Force did nothing until it was finally dispersed at the end of December and Carrington was sent back to England.

The failure of the expedition to Pietersburg not entirely Carrington's fault.

However much General Carrington can justly be blamed for the want of energy he displayed in supervising the transport of his troops through Portuguese territory, the subsequent failure of the Rhodesian Field Force cannot be laid entirely to his charge. It is true that if his troops had been readier they might have accomplished the very useful diversion to Pietersburg besides assisting in the Western Transvaal; and even in September, when the move would still have been useful, a general of greater energy might have pushed through to Pietersburg. But the recall of the first two brigades when each was on its way to Tuli was not Carrington's fault, and though the long-delayed attempt with part of his third brigade

* Two 15-pdrs. of the 2nd Battery and a squadron of the New Zealanders who had been sent in July to Crocodile Pools were now brought back to Rhodesia. The Field Force therefore now had four 15-pdrs. and four pom-poms, besides six Maxims and twelve squadrons of mounted men.

hardly seemed promising, it is also true that he was recalled a third time when actually on the way. It must indeed be admitted that the actual failure to reach Pietersburg is quite as much attributable to Lord Roberts for keeping so few troops in the Western Transvaal in the first instance, and being consequently compelled to supplement them by any there happened to be at hand, as to any previous mistakes of General Carrington's.

CHAPTER XI

THE ADVANCE TO MIDDELBURG

After Diamond Hill Lord Roberts's main objects were to secure (1) the Delagoa Bay railway,

FROM Lord Roberts's point of view these events in the Western Transvaal, and in Rhodesia, were merely incidental. His chief pre-occupation, after organising the operations against the Free State Boers, was to bring about the submission of the Transvaal Government and of Louis Botha's army, both of whom were still firmly established on the Delagoa Bay railway. Nor had he any doubt that the best way of effecting this object, and of so ending the war, was to make a direct advance along that railway. Once driven from it, the Boers would be cut off, not only from foreign sources of supply, but from all communication with the outside world. Even if their army and their government escaped immediate defeat and capture during such an advance, they would soon be driven to terms by the loss of the asset, which alone, according to all appearances, still enabled them to keep up some form of organized resistance to the British armies. Besides this offensive policy, however, the need of strategically strengthening his defensive position was impressed upon Lord Roberts by his first week's experience in Pretoria. As long as his main army could be fed, it would always be able to hold its own; but while he depended for supplies on a single line of railway, which at any moment was liable to interruption, he could feel no permanent security. A secondary, but still very important object with him, therefore, was to open up, as a second line of supply, the still unconquered part of the Natal railway between Volksrust and the capital.

(2) The Natal railway.

His plans for so doing.

Thus, after Diamond Hill, Lord Roberts's principal objec-

tives in the Transvaal were the two lines of railway to mati Poort and Volksrust respectively. Buller's occupation of Volksrust on June 12,* and Ian Hamilton's entry into Heidelberg ten days later, left only 120 miles of the latter railway to occupy before a second connection would be established between Pretoria and the sea. The task of capturing and repairing these 120 miles was assigned to Buller. For the capture of the Delagoa Bay railway, which he regarded as his main offensive object, the Field-Marshal contemplated the employment of several columns in combination. The remainder of his main army was to march due east along the railway; Buller, having secured the Natal line, was to co-operate by a flank march from the south; Carrington, with part of the Rhodesian Field Force, was to cut off the Boer retreat northwards by occupying Pietersburg; and Baden-Powell was to come up from the west to Warmbaths, also on the Pietersburg railway, to protect the base at Pretoria. An attempt was also to be made at cutting off the Boer retreat eastwards by sending a small force through Swaziland to destroy the railway at some point east of Machadodorp.

Louis Botha also recognises importance of Delagoa Bay railway.

On the Boer side, Louis Botha, after his retreat from Diamond Hill, had established his headquarters at Balmoral, a station half-way between Machadodorp and Pretoria, on the Delagoa Bay railway. He appreciated hardly less than Lord Roberts the importance of retaining control of this line, even though the Boer influence at Lourenço Marques was no longer what it had been in the days of their early successes. Since then their favoured position † had been in some degree impaired not only by their defeats in the field, but also by the arrival in April of Commander Crowe, R.N., as British Consul-General. Before he came the partiality of the Portuguese officials for the Boers was so evident that contraband of war was smuggled almost openly into the Transvaal; but his vigorous efforts, well seconded by Captain A. N. Campbell, R.A., whom he had brought with him from Buller's intelligence staff, soon introduced a more rigid system of supervision over the railway and limited the complaisance

* See chap. ix., p. 300.

† See vol. iii., pp. 102–4.

of the Portuguese; moreover, by spending large sums in the purchase of all available stocks of goods, which could not actually be classed under the category of contraband of war, he prevented their falling into the hands of the Boers. Nevertheless, in spite of these restrictions, the Boers still had great advantages, both material and moral, in their access to Delagoa Bay; for it left them a possible retreat and a means of obtaining a certain amount of supplies and even some recruits.* Botha had a further reason for wishing to retain his hold on the line, that President Kruger with the government officials and the State treasure were established at Machadodorp Station. Kruger, no longer a young man like Steyn, would obviously not be able to adopt the peripatetic life of his brother president. It might, therefore, become a serious question how to guard him from capture, if he were once driven away from the comparative comfort and security of the railway.

Botha stays at Balmoral during June.

Botha remained at Balmoral until the temporary demoralization usual after a retreat had run its course in his army. During the last weeks of June many Transvaal burghers handed in rifles to the English and went back quietly to their farms. But as the English troops made no offensive movement, the Boer leaders had ample time to reorganize their forces, and many of the very burghers who had surrendered returned to their commandos after a rest. This result was partly due to a wise redistribution of forces effected by Botha. He had already sent back the Wakkerstroom commando from the main army to its own district, thinking it would fight better there;† he now extended the

* Immediately after the battle of Diamond Hill, Botha sent a foreign officer with a commission to smuggle through some ammunition and war stores waiting at Lourenço Marques and to buy up other necessaries. This officer found things very different from what they had been when he landed three months before. Then Delagoa Bay seemed almost a Dutch port; now in his attempts to make purchases in the town he would often find an English agent at his elbow outbidding him at any price he chose to offer. Nevertheless he succeeded in smuggling through his ammunition and war stores by bribing a custom house official not to look too closely at certain biscuit tins and meal sacks which he conveyed in a goods truck.

† See chap. iv., p. 137.

principle, and arranged, as far as possible, that each commando should be fighting in the country which it knew best, and where it would be most likely to find recruits. The large Middelburg commando, under Fourie, which had hitherto been fighting in Natal, was brought up to Bronkhorst Spruit to cover the principal town of its own district; the Heidelberg, Bethal, Ermelo and Carolina commandos were detached from his own army to assist his brother Christiaan in preventing Buller's advance through those places; while at the beginning of July De la Rey took off to the Magaliesberg most of the men of the western commandos still east of Pretoria. Thus about the beginning of July the disposition of the Boer forces in the Eastern Transvaal was as follows: Grobler had the Waterberg and Zoutpansberg commandos based on Pienaars River Station, to defend the northern line to Pietersburg and to act as a link between De la Rey and Botha; north-east of Pretoria, between the Pietersburg and Delagoa Bay lines, Erasmus was stationed with the Pretoria commando; the Middelburg commando guarded the railway; and further east, at Machadodorp, the Boer Government had a bodyguard composed of Lydenburg men and of Police; between the railway and Springs Ben Viljoen, who had recently been promoted general from the command of the Johannesburg commando, had a miscellaneous force, consisting of part of the Krugersdorp commando, under Kemp,* the Germiston (Gravett) and Johannesburg (Pienaar)† commandos, the Johannesburg Police and some smaller detachments, including the foreigners who had not already returned to Europe; Commandant Dirksen kept his Boksburg commando in the neighbourhood of Springs and Boksburg. All the foregoing commandos were under the more immediate direction of Louis Botha. His brother Christiaan had charge of those along the Natal line; under him Buys commanded the Heidelbergers near Heidelberg, and kept in touch with Dirksen; south-east of Buys, the Bethal, Standerton, Ermelo,

Distribution of Boer forces in the Transvaal at the beginning of July.

* The greater part of the Krugersdorp commando had returned to the west under De la Rey.

† Commandant Pienaar succeeded Ben Viljoen in the command of the Johannesburg commando, but was very soon superseded by W. J. Viljoen, Ben Viljoen's brother.

Carolina, Piet Retief and Wakkerstroom commandos and remains of the Lydenburg and Swaziland contingents held the high ground north of the railway, the strongest division under the command of Joubert, a relative of the late commandant-general, being near Graskop, in the mountainous country north of Volksrust and Wakkerstroom.

Good scouting and good information of the Boers.

Although this was the general disposition of the Transvaal forces in the east for nearly two months, they were kept moving within certain limits, as weak spots appeared in Lord Roberts's defences. Such changes were facilitated by the more than usually excellent information obtained by Botha of his adversary's movements. His scouts, chiefly taken from the ranks of the foreign volunteers, frequently penetrated the British lines, particularly in the neighbourhood of the railway. Botha also profited by Lord Roberts's leniency in permitting not only the wives of combatants, but even surrendered fighters, to stay under very slight supervision in Pretoria and Johannesburg; for such people often gave him valuable warnings. This excellent intelligence greatly helped to neutralize Botha's lack of numbers. What the number of Boer combatants in the Eastern Transvaal actually was after Diamond Hill it is almost impossible to ascertain, partly for the reason that they varied from time to time. Eight thousand, of which the larger proportion was with Louis Botha, may be taken as not far from the mark.

Botha had no fixed plan.

Botha does not appear at this time to have had any well-defined plan of aggressive action. He had certainly given up hope of beating the English, and for the present he confined himself to a hand-to-mouth policy, ready to take advantage of any mistake which Lord Roberts might make, and to delay his advance by inconvenient attacks.

Till the end of June Roberts on the defensive awaiting supplies and reinforcements.

Roberts's own striking force had been so seriously reduced by the absence of Hamilton's column, that from the middle to the end of June he was perforce content to hold defensive positions on the north and east of Pretoria. At first, with the exception of Henry's M.I. on the Donkerhoek and Diamond Hill ridges, he withdrew all the troops of the main army close in to Pretoria; but, finding that Botha's scouts were thereby

emboldened to advance even beyond the positions from which they had been driven on June 12, he extended and strengthened his lines. By the end of the month he had a detachment of Hutton's M.I. near Onderste Poort in the north, French's two cavalry brigades at Kameeldrift, supported by a battalion and battery of Tucker's, and Hutton * with Alderson's corps at Derdepoort; Pole-Carew's infantry with Henry's M.I. were holding the line from Franspoort to Kleinfontein, opposite the Diamond Hill ridge, and Pilcher's M.I. corps had been brought down to Tigerpoort, a pass about twenty miles from Pretoria over the ridge of that name.† Here Pilcher was joined by Mahon on his arrival from the west with the Imperial Light Horse, "M" Battery, and two battalions of Hart's brigade. The main line of railway as far as the Vaal was still held by Smith-Dorrien,‡ who had detached the Canadian Regiment and some of Ross's M.I. to guard a supply depot being formed at the end of the little branch line to Springs. Hart was at Heidelberg, twenty-five miles south of Springs, having been left there by Hunter with about 2,000 troops and six guns.§ His duties were two-fold, to guard the railway between Germiston and Heidelberg, and to stretch out a hand to Buller as he came up the line from Volksrust. Hart succeeded well in his first object; he spent so much trouble in fortifying Heidelberg and the Nigel coal-mine, half-way between Heidelberg and Springs, that Buys's commando in the neighbourhood was never able to make any impression on his defences, or to break through to the railway. He also prepared the way for Buller by repairing the line for twelve miles south-east of Heidelberg, and establishing a post at Zuikerbosch.

* Immediately after the battle of Diamond Hill Hutton had been employed in an expedition to the west of Pretoria, but he had returned to Derdepoort by June 26. See chap. x., p. 344.

† See chap. viii., p. 277.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

§ 2nd Dublin Fusiliers, wing of Somerset Light Infantry, Marshall's Horse, the Manchester Company of Imperial Yeomanry, the 28th F.B., and a section of pom-poms.

Attempts to cut the Delagoa Bay line.

During this latter half of June occurred the only attempt, which had the smallest measure of success, to carry out the project of cutting the Delagoa Bay line in rear of the Boers. From the early days of the war the advantage of cutting this line had been recognized by the English, and several attempts were made with that object. * The first was made in December by some members of the British colony at Delagoa Bay, but their intention was suspected, and they were unable to get near the railway; in April a similar result followed the endeavour made by a small party sent round from Cape Town with Lord Roberts's approval. This second endeavour gave the Boers warning, and they increased the guard at the Komati Poort bridge from eight or ten men to forty, a number which was still further raised to a hundred on the rumour of the next and most ambitious expedition. At the end of May Strathcona's Horse, about 600 strong, were ordered to embark in two detachments at Cape Town, the first, consisting of two squadrons, to land at Durban and thence proceed to Zululand, while the third squadron was to land at Kosi Bay, at the northern extremity of Tongaland; the plan was for the two detachments to march by separate routes through Swaziland and meet at the Komati Poort bridge. After blowing this up they were to entrench themselves just outside the Portuguese borders, where they could at the same time have food brought to them and prevent the rebuilding of the bridge by the Boers. The scheme had been worked out with some elaboration, and, under Admiral Harris's orders, careful preparations had been made by the fleet to cover the difficult landing at Kosi Bay. But on June 2, when the squadron had already arrived in the bay, it was reported that the Boers had received notice of the affair and were preparing to oppose the force in strength. Since a surprise was regarded as essential, the attempt was abandoned, and Strathcona's Horse were sent up to join Buller. The next expedition was carried out by some colonial scouts of Buller's army, who had been sent up under a Sergeant Steinaecker at

* See chap. iii., p. 90.

the beginning of April to lurk in Swaziland. After various delays and adventures they reached the railway on June 17, blew up a bridge between Kaap Muiden and the Portuguese frontier, but failed in the attempt on the Komati Poort bridge. Though traffic to Delagoa Bay was stopped for about a fortnight, the Boers suffered no serious inconvenience from the explosion.

By beginning of July Roberts ready to start east after clearing Boers from Tigerpoort ridge.

By the beginning of July Buller was approaching Heidelberg, and Roberts felt that his own preparations were complete enough to warrant a start east on the 8th. Supplies had been accumulated at Irene and Springs, as well as at Pretoria; the cavalry and mounted infantry, which, owing to loss of horses, had been reduced to less than half their strength after Diamond Hill, had again been brought up to their full numbers; although Carrington's co-operation was not forthcoming, the west was so quiet that there seemed every probability that Baden-Powell could safely be brought up to Warmbaths by the appointed date. On the north and east there had been a little skirmishing on the outpost lines, but the Boers had nowhere shown themselves in any force, except in the hilly country between Tigerpoort and Springs. Zwavelpoort and Tigerpoort, the two passes over the Tigerpoort ridge nearest to Pretoria, were within the British lines, but a reconnaissance by Pilcher had shown that the Witpoort and Koffyspruit passes further east were held in strength by Viljoen's men. They also had a laager a little further south on the high ground near Olifantsfontein, whereby they could keep in touch with Dirksen's commando near Springs. As a preliminary to his advance, Roberts recognised the necessity of clearing this country for his right flank, all the more as the presence of a large force here was a serious menace not only to the Cape railway but even to Pretoria itself.

July 4. This duty given to Hutton.

The task was given to Hutton. On the 4th July he took Alderson's corps down to a camp west of Zwavelpoort, and was joined there by two of Barton's Fusilier battalions, with some guns and Yeomanry. His instructions were to attack the Boers without loss of time with this force, which, together

with Pilcher's and Mahon's already on the spot, amounted to 5,500 men. *

Botha prepared to meet him.

Botha had also seen the strategical value of this position and had made his preparations accordingly. Already, on the 28th June, he had moved forward his headquarters from Balmoral to Elands River Station, and had decided, after holding a council of war, to make a general attack on Pretoria. But in the evening the mere rumour of an advance by Buller on Bethal had so worked upon his apprehensions for the President's safety that he had hastily returned to Balmoral. Then, as it soon became evident that no immediate danger was to be feared from that quarter, Botha again came west to direct Viljoen's operations near Bronkhorst Spruit. Most of the commandos east of Pretoria, including Dirksen's, had by the 6th July been brought

* General Hutton's force was composed of:—

Under Colonel Bannatine-Allason	"G" Battery R.H.A. "M" Battery R.H.A. 66th Battery R.F.A. Four 5-inch guns R.G.A. "L" section pom-poms. "D" section maxims. Ammunition column.
Under General Mahon	1st Batt. M.I. 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles. New Zealand Mounted Rifles. Imperial Light Horse. 20th Co. Imperial Yeomanry.
Under Colonel Brooke	2nd Batt. Royal Fusiliers. 2nd Batt. Royal Irish Fusiliers. 1st Batt. Border Regiment. 1st Batt. Connaught Rangers.
	R.A.M.C. Bearer Company. N. S. Wales Field Hospital. N. S. Wales Bearer Company. Mounted Pioneers. Corps of Brigade Scouts.

The detached force at Tigerpoort under Lieutenant-Colonel Pilcher:—

3rd Batt. M.I.	"C" section pom-poms.
Queensland M.I.	One galloping maxim.

Altogether there were 5,500 men, of whom nearly half were mounted, with 18 field and 4 heavy guns.

opposite Hutton's force, with the result that Botha had about 3,000 men at this point.*

July 5–7. Hutton reconnoitres Witpoort, Koffyspruit, and Olifantsfontein.

On the 5th and 6th Hutton sent Pilcher to make a reconnaissance along the Tigerpoort ridge as far as Witpoort, and Mahon to the Koffyspruit pass further east; and on the evening of the 6th he camped at Rietfontein, south of Witpoort, leaving Pilcher to hold the Tigerpoort pass. Next day he sent Mahon, with the mounted men and a battery, towards Olifantsfontein, and at his request Smith-Dorrien sent up the Canadian Regiment and some M.I. from Springs, to prevent the escape of any Boers that Mahon might drive down south. Hutton himself remained with his infantry and the rest of his artillery on the high ground round his camp, which commanded the exit from Witpoort and the road to Olifantsfontein. Owing to some bad scouting by the I.L.H., Mahon, after marching eight miles unmolested, walked into a trap prepared for him by the Boers. The I.L.H. retrieved their mistake by two gallant charges up the ridge from which the Boers commanded the column. Nevertheless, Mahon, who was somewhat tardily reinforced by Hutton, was obliged to retire on Rietfontein with a total loss of thirty-five men, which would have been heavier if the Boer shells had been more effective.

Botha's strong position round Hutton.

After this small success Botha brought up reinforcements and closed round Hutton in front and on each flank. His main body, under Viljoen, was holding the approach to Bronkhorst Spruit, the Johannesburg commando was on the ridge between Witpoort and Koffyspruit, and Dirksen, on the right flank, was between Hutton and Springs. Botha's evident expectation was that as soon as Hutton advanced he would be able to cut him off from Pretoria and secure an unimpeded approach to the capital for himself. But Hutton was not to be led into the trap. His strong force of infantry and artillery made his camp at Rietfontein perfectly secure and at the same time acted as a protection to Pretoria; he kept open the road to Springs with some of his mounted troops, and posted a mixed force on his right rear. An

Hutton holds his ground.

* Some of the English estimates, however, put the Boer numbers at a higher figure.

attempt to drive the Boers out of Witpoort was not equally successful, owing to Mahon's delay in advancing from Rietfontein to co-operate with Pilcher, who had marched along the ridge from Tigerpoort. But though Hutton held his ground well and prevented Botha from advancing, he had made no progress in clearing the ground for a British advance. Accordingly, on Hutton's report of the situation on the evening of the 9th, Roberts determined to reinforce him and to send French to take over the command.

July 10. French comes with reinforcements.

On July 10 the Suffolk Regiment set Pilcher free for more active operations by taking over his post at Tigerpoort pass, and the 1st Cavalry Brigade* joined Hutton from Kameeldrift. French on his arrival found that Hutton had already formed a plan for the next day's operations. Mahon with his own force, and Hutton with the infantry and the rest of the artillery, were to make a direct attack from the south on Witpoort and then clear the ridge as far east as the Koffyspruit pass; Alderson and Pilcher were to meet north of the ridge, and in conjunction with Henry's M.I., whom Pole-Carew promised to send down to their left flank, to take the Boers in rear and drive them over Bronkhorst Spruit; on the extreme right Porter's cavalry were to seize the high ground west of the same spruit, and commanding Olifantsfontein. The whole of the troops thus engaged, not reckoning the Suffolks at Tigerpoort and Henry's M.I., would amount to 7,000.

July 11. French and Hutton drive Boers off Tigerpoort ridge.

French approved of the plan, which was carried out on July 11 with almost entire success. Porter's brigade easily drove off the Boers holding Olifantsfontein beyond the spruit, whence they carried on an ineffectual artillery duel with the cavalry, while Mahon and Hutton cleared Witpoort and the ridge as far as Koffyspruit. The only part of the scheme which miscarried was that assigned to Alderson and Pilcher, who had kept too far north to be able to intercept the Boers escaping from Witpoort or to inflict any damage upon them as they retreated.

* The Scots Greys were holding Commando and Zilikats Neks on this date, so the 8th Hussars were detached from Dickson's brigade to take their place in the 1st Brigade.

One reason for this easy success was that French, instead of having the 3,000 or 4,000 Boers who had given Hutton so much trouble, had at the most only 1,500 to disperse. Botha had received early information of the reinforcements being sent to Hutton, and had immediately seen that he had for the present lost his chance of a success on the south-east of Pretoria. Like a prudent general, therefore, he had withdrawn more than half Viljoen's force to employ them against some less well-guarded point.

But French has to hurry back to Pretoria on news of Zilikats Nek.

French had barely completed his operations shortly after noon on the 11th, when he received an urgent message from Lord Roberts ordering him to send Pilcher's and Mahon's brigades and three of Hutton's infantry battalions * post-haste to Pretoria, and to return thither himself, leaving Hutton with Alderson's corps, Porter's brigade, the Royal Irish Fusiliers and the Suffolks to hold the ground from Tigerpoort pass to Bronkhorst Spruit.

This sudden order was due to the news which had just arrived of De la Rey's attack on Zilikats Nek and of Grobler's on Onderste Poort.† The full extent of De la Rey's success had not as yet appeared, but the two attacks coming together, combined with the prospect of renewed activity by Botha in the east, gave Roberts serious apprehension that a general movement on Pretoria and Johannesburg was contemplated. And if such an attack were pressed with vigour, especially by the new commandos in the west, which seemed to be springing out of the ground at De la Rey's call,‡ a serious disaster seemed no remote possibility.

Ill-guarded state of Pretoria.

The despatch of Porter's brigade to the south-east and of the Greys to Zilikats Nek had left the region north-east of Pretoria with only two cavalry regiments, at Onderste Poort and Derdepoort; the railway guards to the south had been weakened by the loss of the Suffolks sent to Tigerpoort, and of the Shropshires and 2nd Gordons, whom Smith-Dorrien had taken with him to Krugersdorp on July 9th,

* The original order was for four battalions to go, but upon Hutton's representations he was allowed to keep the Royal Irish Fusiliers as well as the Suffolks.

† See chap. x., pp. 349-354.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

when he gave up the command on the railway to Chermside.* In Johannesburg there were no guns and only three battalions as garrison, while, although Tucker's force at Pretoria was nominally 4,000 strong, the absence of the Hampshires at Derdepoort and of the Lincolns at Zilikats Nek left him with only two battalions, a few mounted infantry and seventeen guns to hold the town.† To make matters worse, both Pretoria and Johannesburg were full of Boer sympathizers, some of whom, besides giving information to the commandos, were plotting actively against the British administration. Already Cordua, a German officer on parole, was preparing a scheme for kidnapping Lord Roberts and other officers, and at Johannesburg a plot was afoot to celebrate the taking of the Bastille on the 14th July by overpowering the officers of the garrison at a race-meeting announced for that day, and then handing over the town to a commando waiting near the Crocodile River.

French's scheme for dealing with the situation.

French's first impulse on receiving Roberts's brief outline of the situation was characteristic. Counting on the Boers' extreme sensitiveness about their line of retreat, he suggested that he should immediately follow up the success gained on the 11th, and threaten the Boer communications to the east, as the best means of averting an attack from the west. He even offered to carry on the pursuit with the small force left to Hutton. But Roberts would take no such risk until his western flank was safer. If he could have spared French enough troops to inflict a crushing blow on Botha, this would no doubt have been the best method of dealing with the situation, but the amount of damage which the small force available might inflict on the Boers was certainly not worth the risk of a second disaster. In view, therefore, of De la Rey's unknown strength in the west and of his own weakness, Roberts was probably wise in waiting for reinforcements before committing himself further.

Roberts's vigorous action.

Though he did not adopt French's suggestion, Roberts

* *Ibid.*, p. 349.

† So slightly was Pretoria guarded, that when Colonel Brooke marched into the town on the 12th with Hutton's infantry, the first sign of the British occupation which they saw was a single sentry on a bridge half-way through the town.

showed his usual vigour in taking measures against the dangers which threatened him. In Johannesburg Major Davies, through the excellent intelligence system which he had started as chief of the police, discovered the race-course plot in time, arrested over 400 of those principally concerned and, by Lord Roberts's orders, deported them.* Cordua's plot at Pretoria was not discovered till a month later, when he was arrested and shot after trial before a court-martial; but Lord Roberts had already determined that the crowd of women and other relatives of burghers on commando should be sent away from Pretoria. Besides the information which they gave to the commandos, the necessity of feeding them added considerably to his difficulties in collecting sufficient supplies for his own army by means of a railway which was continually being interrupted by the attacks of their friends. Arrangements were therefore made, in spite of Botha's protests, to send them to be taken care of by their own relatives. About 1,000 women and children were sent forward to the Boer lines by the end of the month, and several thousands in August. At the same time a large number of foreigners, including most of the Hollander railway officials who had refused to work for the English, were deported to Europe. At this stage of the war, when food was still plentiful with the Boers, the despatch of the women to the commandos was certainly not a measure calculated to bring it to an early end; for the women throughout were the most irreconcilable element in the population, and by their presence encouraged the men to persist in the struggle.

Besides these purging measures, Roberts strengthened his position in Pretoria by drawing on various quarters for reinforcements. The force detached from Hutton has already been noticed; the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry were brought up from Irene and battalions of the Buffs and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders from Kroonstad and

* The foreign consuls entirely supported the English authorities in the measures taken as far as they concerned men of their own nationality. There is, indeed, no doubt that the possession of Johannesburg by the English, and the protection they afforded to the mines, in which a great many foreign shareholders were interested, had a great deal to do with the practical acquiescence in our success shown by foreign nations.

Heilbron respectively; Hickman's newly-formed corps of mounted infantry, having finished its work in the Orange River Colony,* arrived at Pretoria during the 11th and 12th. These reinforcements enabled Roberts to form a new column under Ian Hamilton, who had now recovered from his accident, consisting of a brigade of infantry commanded by Colonel Cunningham of the Derbyshire Regiment, Hickman's M.I. and 16 guns.† This new column was sent to clear the dis-

* See chap. ix., p. 301.

† The division was finally constituted on July 14, the following being the composition of the troops:—

Brigadier-General Cunningham's Brigade	1st Batt. King's Own Scottish Borderers. 1st Batt. Border Regiment. 2nd Batt. Royal Berkshire Regiment. 1st Batt. Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. 22nd Field Hospital. Half of the 6th Brigade Bearer Company.
Colonel Hickman's Brigade	1st Regiment Mounted Infantry. 2nd Regiment Mounted Infantry. [These regiments were composed of details from the 2nd M.I. brigade, released prisoners and convalescents.] Queensland Imperial Bushmen. Elswick Battery. Section of pom-poms. 13th Field Hospital.
Royal Artillery under Lieutenant-Colonel Watson	Two 5-inch guns under Major Brooke Smith, R.G.A., of No. 97 Company R.G.A. Two 6-inch Howitzers under Major J. R. H. Allen, of No. 15 Battery, R.G.A. "D" Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery, under Major W. G. Hurdman.
Corps Troops under Colonel L. G. Brooke (Connaught Rangers)	2nd Batt. Royal Fusiliers. 1st Connaught Rangers.

Smith-Dorrien's newly formed brigade, composed as follows,
1st Batt. Gordon Highlanders,
2nd Batt. East Kent Regiment (The Buffs),
2nd Batt. Shropshire Light Infantry,
19th Field Hospital,
19th Bearer Company,
was also attached to the column in orders, but it was not until August 31 that, on reaching Belfast, Smith-Dorrien came under Ian Hamilton's command, and took over a brigade which contained only the Gordon Highlanders of the battalions originally assigned to his brigade. Before that, however, Mahon's brigade and Pilcher's M.I. corps had been attached to Ian Hamilton's column.

trict north of Pretoria; French, with Dickson's, Mahon's and Pilcher's forces, filled the gap between Hamilton and Pole-Carew; and Pole-Carew brought Henry to the neighbourhood of Edendale, leaving the Diamond Hill ridge to be held exclusively by the Guards Brigade. On the west Methuen was ordered up with a brigade of infantry, some Yeomanry and guns from Kroonstad to take vigorous action in combination with Smith-Dorrien and Baden-Powell against De la Rey.

Botha prepares a diversion on the east.

Botha, who had returned to the railway with some of Viljoen's force before French's and Hutton's successful engagement of the 11th, only heard of De la Rey's victory on the 13th, two days after its occurrence. Assuming that Roberts would immediately endeavour to retrieve this defeat by bringing all his forces to bear on De la Rey, he determined to divert his attention by simultaneous attacks along the eastern front on the 16th. North of the railway line Botha met with no success; in fact, beyond an attack against some Tasmanians at Edendale, which was easily repulsed when Pole-Carew had sent up some 4·7 naval guns, the 4th regiment M.I. and the Victorian Mounted Rifles, the Boers, instead of attacking, found themselves being swept away by Ian Hamilton and French's columns, who drove them in full retreat to the north-east.

July 16. Attacks north of the railway.

Simultaneous attacks by Viljoen on Hutton.

Viljoen's attacks gave more trouble, in spite of Hutton's very careful preparations against surprise. After French's departure Hutton moved his headquarters to a camping-ground east of Witpoort and nearer Bronkhorst Spruit, and disposed the 4,000 troops left to him on the ground already won. The twenty miles of ridge from Tigerpoort Pass to the spruit was guarded by the Suffolks under Colonel Mackenzie at Tigerpoort, by Major Munn * with three companies of the 2nd R. I. Fusiliers, sixty of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, and two pom-poms at Witpoort, and by Colonel Alderson with part of the 1st M.I. corps, two squadrons

* Major Munn, it will be remembered, had been in command of the six companies of Royal Irish Fusiliers at Nicholson's Nek. See vol. ii., p. 237.

of cavalry and two guns near Koffyspruit. The cavalry,* with a horse battery, held the hills near Olifantsfontein, and Hutton kept the rest of the Irish Fusiliers and of Alderson's M.I., with the 5-inch guns and two batteries as a reserve, on the high ground near his camp. On the 15th, Botha had sent back portions of the Middelburg and Krugersdorp commandos and some German volunteers to reinforce Viljoen, who started from his laager in the small hours of the following morning. He divided his force of 2,000 men into three parties. The first, composed of the Johannesburg and Germiston commandos under Pienaar and Gravett, with a Krupp gun and some pom-poms, was to attack Witpoort from the north; Kemp, with the Krugersdorp commando, the Germans, the Johannesburg Police, and a 15-pounder, was sent also from the north towards the intrenchments at Koffyspruit; and Griffiths, with the Middelburg detachment, was to move across Bronkhorst Spruit against the cavalry on the south of the ridge, in conjunction with Dirksen from the direction of Springs. Each attack was delivered simultaneously at dawn. Kemp, in the centre, succeeded in driving back Alderson's outposts, but his further advance was checked by Alderson's main body, and by one of Hutton's 5-inch guns. Griffiths's and Dirksen's attack also met with some slight measure of success, in so far that the advanced cavalry outposts were forced to retire. By 1 o'clock, however, after some heavy rifle and gun-firing, which caused few casualties, the cavalry regained their original positions, and sent the Middelburg and Boksburg men back to the east of Bronkhorst Spruit. On the right Viljoen himself directed the attack on Witpoort. Here Major Munn had placed his infantry and pom-poms on two rocky kopjes flanking the pass, and the New Zealanders on the continuation of the ridge to his left, from which the pass could also be commanded. Viljoen sent a detachment of 250, under Pienaar, to seize the ridge held by the New Zealanders, and the remaining 300 of his party, sup-

Major Munn makes a gallant defence of Witpoort.

* Colonel Porter had broken his collar-bone two days previously, and on this day Colonel Clowes was in command of the brigade. Later Colonel Gordon came up from the Orange River Colony to take his place.

ported by the fire of his Krupp gun and pom-poms, concentrated their attention on the more easterly of the two kopjes. The New Zealanders held the commanding ridge until they suffered the loss of a party of two officers and seventeen men who, in scouting too far from their supports, were surrounded and captured. They then retired, leaving the western ridge in the occupation of the Boers, who now opened a flanking fire on the infantry company holding the more westerly kopje. With the aid of a pom-pom, however, the Boer fire on this side was kept under. The two companies under Lieutenants Knight and Hughes on the other kopje had much greater difficulty in holding their own. In front of them the ground fell in natural terraces, which successively gave the Boers ample cover as the attack progressed, and their right was commanded by high ground. On this side the Boers made their most determined effort, continually calling on the Irishmen to surrender, and creeping up gradually nearer in front and on the flank until they came within eighty yards of the trenches. But though the odds were against them both in numbers and in position, Major Munn's men held obstinately to their ground, fighting without assistance from 7 A.M. till 1 P.M. Then, at last, Alderson arrived with part of his corps; the Canadian Mounted Rifles were sent forward to make a counter-attack on the Boers, and by a brilliant charge forced them to give way. In this charge, Lieutenant Borden, only son of the Canadian Minister of Defence, fell at the head of his troop. Hutton had failed to obtain the assistance for which he had signalled from Chermside's mounted infantry stationed at Springs, and had therefore been unwilling to part with his reserves in the centre until the cavalry had recovered the ground they lost in the morning. But as soon as he heard from Clowes that the right flank was safe, he came up with the rest of the mounted troops and some guns to hasten the retirement of the Boers.

Viljoen driven off.

This engagement of the 16th July was well fought on both sides. Viljoen, whose first independent action this was, gave proof of great skill in his plan of attack, and in the secrecy with which it was prepared. He was also well

A good fight on both sides.

supported by his men, who fought with the greatest courage and determination, especially in the attempt on Witpoort. In all three engagements the Boers achieved minor successes, which might have been improved, if their numbers had been greater, or if the English had been less well prepared, and had not shown equal determination. Hutton, by his wise choice of ground, and by the watchfulness which he exercised himself and energetically impressed upon his subordinates, was well prepared against surprise; and if, as on the 7th July, he showed over-caution in the husbanding of his reserves, it had no bad consequences. But even his careful preparation would have been of little use if Major Munn's small party had not fought with the spirit they showed in defending the pass for six hours against a force nearly three times their number.*

Buller working his way up the Natal line.

While these events were occurring in the neighbourhood of Pretoria, Buller had been slowly working his way up the Natal line. When he arrived at Volksrust on the 12th of June, Roberts urged him to occupy Standerton, sixty miles further on, without delay, in order to isolate the Free State forces, who used that town as their chief centre of communication with the Transvaal headquarters. After that he was to open up the Natal line and send up a column towards the Delagoa line. Buller, however, waited a week at Volksrust for the Laing's Nek tunnel to be repaired and supplies to come through by train. During this interval he sent Hildyard with Wynne's and Dundonald's brigades, a howitzer battery, and some naval guns, to occupy Wakkerstroom, a small town twenty miles further east.† After receiving the submission of a large number of burghers, this force was withdrawn, and shortly afterwards the Boers reoccupied the town. Buller also made arrangements for the defence of Natal, leaving there about 15,000 men, consisting of Lyttelton's division and three other infantry battalions,

June 12–19. His distribution of forces.

* Viljoen's attack on Hutton's position may usefully be compared with De la Rey's attack on Clements's force on February 12. See vol. iii., pp. 463–469.

† Wakkerstroom had formally surrendered to one of Lyttelton's officers on the 13th, but, as some mounted infantry were attacked there two days later, it was thought necessary to send a more imposing force.

MAJOR-GENERAL E. T. H. HUTTON, C.B., A.D.C.,

COMMANDING 1ST M.I. BRIGADE.

Photo by Humphrey & Co., Melbourne.

Burn-Murdoch's cavalry brigade, and the Natal Volunteers,* besides fifty guns. Lyttelton was placed in command of the northern part, Major-General Wolfe Murray of the lines of communication from Newcastle southwards, and Colonel Downing, R.A., of the Drakensberg defences. Thus from the start, in spite of Roberts's advice, Buller seriously diminished the army with which he was to advance in the Transvaal, and it is questionable whether he could not then, as he subsequently found possible, have held Natal with fewer men in well-intrenched positions.

June 19–23. Advance to Standerton.

On the 19th Buller started from Sandspruit, a few miles north of Volksrust, with Clery's division and Wynne's and Dundonald's brigades.† On the 22nd the mounted men, a day's march in advance, entered Standerton, where it was discovered that, if they had come only two days earlier, they might have rescued a party of the Irish Yeomanry passing through as prisoners of war from Lindley on their way to Nooitgedacht. On Dundonald's approach the Standerton and Heidelberg commandos retired, but before leaving destroyed the railway bridge over the Vaal, and set fire to a large stack of railway material. But eighteen engines and 148 carriages and trucks were captured by the English. On the following day some of Clery's infantry, who had marched twenty-one miles on the 22nd, also entered Standerton.

Before any further advance was made, Wynne was given charge of the line from Standerton to Paardekop with a force consisting of the 11th Brigade, Gough's and Bethune's M.I., and eight guns; Hildyard had previously been left to defend the railway from Paardekop to Volksrust with Coke's brigade, Brocklehurst's cavalry and twenty-eight guns. The Boers assembled at Graskop under Joubert gave considerable

* From Volksrust General Dartnell and the Natal Volunteers returned to Natal, as the terms under which they were enlisted prevented their being used outside their own borders. When this fine body of men, who had rendered signal service all through the war, were sent back, they were publicly thanked in a highly laudatory Army Order.

† On the 20th June Strathcona's Horse arrived after their abortive expedition to Kosi Bay, and were attached to Dundonald's brigade. It is interesting to note that their first engagement was on July 1, Dominion Day.

June 28. Coke attacks Boers on Graskop.

trouble by flying incursions on Hildyard's and Wynne's posts, so on the 28th Coke was ordered to clear the hills north of Sandspruit in which they lurked, and if possible to occupy Amersfoort. On that day he marched out with the Dublins and Middlesex and ten guns, his left flank being covered by Brocklehurst's cavalry, and drove off a small body of Boers near Graskop, but next day, on attempting to advance further, he found a force of 1,000 Boers with seven guns so strongly posted in the difficult country south of Amersfoort that he was obliged to retire.

June 30–July 2. Clery advances to Greylingstad.

On the 28th June Buller ordered Clery to go south towards Vrede. But this diversion, which would have been most useful to Roberts more than a month earlier, when he was still at Kroonstad, was now rendered unnecessary by the despatch of Hunter's column south of the Vaal. Roberts, therefore, again explained to Buller that as soon as the Natal line had been opened he wished him to send a force up north to co-operate with his own advance along the Delagoa Bay line. Accordingly this movement south was countermanded, and after a week at Standerton Clery started on the 30th June to establish communication with Heidelberg, leaving Hamilton with the 2nd Brigade and the South African Light Horse at Standerton, and taking with him Cooper's brigade, Thorneycroft's M.I. and Strathcona's Horse under Dundonald, four guns of the Chestnut Troop, the 63rd Battery, two 12-pounders, two 5-inch guns, and two howitzers. Advancing by easy stages he reached Greylingstad on July 2, and on July 4 relieved Hart's post at Zuikerbosch with half a battalion of the King's Royal Rifles and fifty of Strathcona's Horse. He himself remained for a week at Vlakfontein, half-way between Greylingstad and Heidelberg.

Activity of Boers on the line.

During this period the railway line and telegraph were cut several times and frequent sallies were made on Paardekop, where Wynne's and Hildyard's areas joined. Reconnaissances against some of Botha's parties were made by Colonel Byng with the South African Light Horse from Standerton, and on July 13 Wynne and Hildyard made a joint attempt to capture a party near Paardekop. But these

reprisals seemed to have no effect, and Buller felt so insecure that he asked for reinforcements from Hunter's troops, which Roberts was unable to spare him.

July 11–15. Clery takes a sweep north of the line.

On July 11 Clery was ordered to clear the country north-east of Greylingstad, so he withdrew his detachment at Zuikerbosch, which Hart reoccupied with the same garrison as before, and left Greylingstad on the 12th with three and a half battalions of infantry, 500 mounted men and thirteen guns, including a 5-inch gun. Taking an easterly direction about six miles north of the railway, he met several parties of Boers, with one of which the mounted men had an indecisive action in which they lost eleven men, but in general he found little opposition. In the course of his four days' expedition Clery marched about thirty miles, and on the 15th he returned to the railway between Greylingstad and Standerton.

July 18. Clery starts for Bethal.

On the same day Roberts asked Buller if Clery could assist his advance towards the east by occupying Bethal on the 19th July. As Buller was still doubtful whether he would then be strong enough to guard the Natal railway, Roberts agreed to leave Hart with his 2,000 men at Heidelberg, much as he needed him in the Western Transvaal.

July 20. Recalled to the railway.

After two days' halt to refresh his exhausted transport oxen, Clery started off towards Bethal on the 18th, but he had not gone many miles on his way by the 20th when Roberts found it necessary to recall him to the railway.

II

July 19–22. Roberts's advance delayed by de Wet's tactics and other causes.

Immediately after the defeat of Botha's final attempt against Pretoria on the 16th of July, Roberts completed the arrangements for his advance, which he now intended to commence on the 19th. French with Dickson's brigade was sent back to Hutton's position, in order to take command of the right wing. Ian Hamilton, in combination with Mahon and Pilcher, was to form the left wing north of the line, while Roberts himself would advance along the railway with Pole-Carew's division and Henry's M.I. But various difficulties conspired to delay the advance beyond the date fixed. Ian Hamilton

had, on the 17th, gone to Hamanskraal on the Pietersburg line, further north than was intended, and in turning round to his position nearer Pole-Carew had mistaken the way,* so that he was still too far north on the 19th. On the 20th news reached Pretoria which served to show that de Wet, who had escaped from Hunter's cordon on the 15th,† instead of turning towards Kroonstad, was trekking north-east towards the Delagoa railway. If this was so, it was of the utmost importance to stop him until Broadwood could overtake him. Accordingly Roberts ordered Clery to return to Greylingstad, where he might intercept him, and French and Hutton to stay near Bronkhorst Spruit. On the 21st it was known definitely that de Wet was moving north-west; nevertheless, the Field-Marshal thought it better not to recall Clery again, but to let him occupy Heidelberg and release Hart, who was more than ever required in the Western Free State. On the same day Pole-Carew reported a Boer force with three guns near Morskop, between his line and French's, whereupon Lord Roberts suggested to French that instead of advancing due east, as had been intended, he should cross to the north of the Tigerpoort ridge and come up near Pole-Carew's flank. French objected that by such a change of direction he would expose his own flank to the 800 Boers reported to be in front of him, whereas a direct advance would be more likely to cut off the retreat of any Boers near Morskop, and would certainly relieve Pole-Carew. Lord Roberts yielded to these representations, and on the 23rd the first stage of the advance along the Delagoa railway at last began.

July 23. Start made.

French's idea for his share in the advance.

When French had joined Hutton on the 17th he found himself in command of two cavalry brigades, Hutton's M.I. and two infantry battalions, in all about 4,000 mounted men, 1,500 infantry, 24 field guns and two heavy guns. Except for the infantry and heavy guns, this was a mobile force, well calculated for rapid action and surprises. The original scheme which French had arranged with the

* The mistake arose from the existence of two farms of the name of Boekenhoutkloof, about eight miles from one another. The guide led Ian Hamilton to the wrong one.

† See chap. ix., p. 317.

Commander-in-Chief for his own operations was that he should advance swiftly across the open country in front of him and then describe a curve up to the railway, well to the east of Middelburg. The object of this manœuvre was to cut the line behind Botha, who would thus be caught between the cavalry and the main army advancing from the west. With this view he issued his orders. Dividing his force into three columns, which were to move in concentric curves, he assigned the inner line nearest the railway to Hutton, whose infantry and heavy guns would retard his march, the wider curves being given to Dickson and Gordon. Since his chief object was to surprise the Boers, the movement once begun was to be completed in three days. By that time Hutton was to be due south of Middelburg, Dickson on the railway twelve miles to the east of it, and Gordon twelve miles further east. The successive positions were also so arranged that any attempt of the Boers to escape to the south-east would be prevented.*

A wide sweeping movement.

* The staff work of the cavalry division under the direction of Colonel Haig, General French's chief staff officer, was always excellent, and it is worth giving the original orders issued on the 20th July for the cavalry and Hutton's troops, as a model of clear and concise staff orders, although they were subsequently modified.

"1. The enemy's laager, estimated at about 5,000 with eight guns, is reported to be near Bronkhorst Spruit Station.

A detachment of about 1,000 with three guns hold the hills east of Bronkhorst Spruit opposite Leeuwpoort.

Our main army moves eastward to-morrow in three columns; to-night the left is near Doorn Kraal, the centre about Pienaarspoort.

2. The objective of the right column is to destroy the railway at some point between Middelburg and Belfast, and reach a position on the Middelburg-Lydenburg road, so as to cut off the enemy's retreat.

3. The force will move in three columns, starting at daybreak to-morrow so as to halt in the vicinity of the following places on the dates as under :—

Date.	Right Column under General Gordon.	Centre Column under General Dickson.	Left Column under General Hutton.
Saturday, 21st	Vlakpan	Dieplaagte	Witklipbank
Sunday, 22nd	Leeuwfontein	Steenkool Spruit	Bankfontein
Monday, 23rd	Paarde Kraal	Pan Station	Rhenosterfontein

4. Officers commanding the several columns will be prepared to

July 23. French begins his movement,

The operations originally planned for the first day were carried out with some slight modifications, when French actually started on the 23rd. These modifications were chiefly due to the opposition offered by the Boers, who, during the enforced delay, had probably got wind of French's scheme. The three columns left camp under cover of a fog, which enabled Gordon to secure the drift over the Wilge River at Dieplaagte. But no sooner had he done so than Dirksen came up and delayed his forward movement. Dickson moved due east from Olifantsfontein, and Hutton, crossing to the north of the Tigerpoort ridge, marched in the same direction. After they had gained the high ground between Bronkhorst Spruit and the Wilge River together, Dickson turned down by the western bank of the Wilge and joined Gordon, while Hutton sent Alderson forward to secure Boschpoort Drift on the same river. Alderson succeeded in this after a slight engagement with some Boers holding the eastern bank, and drove them away to the south-east where they were headed back towards the railway by Gordon.

which is restricted by Roberts.

French was still well placed to carry out his plan; on that night, however, he received definite orders from Roberts not to continue his movement to the east, but to make Brugspruit Station his own goal, and Balmoral Hutton's. As before at Diamond Hill, so now with less reason Roberts refused to allow his cavalry to attempt to cut off Botha's army. Whereas at that time he was almost isolated in Pretoria,

Criticism of Roberts's order.

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furnish mutual assistance if required at the crossings of the rivers, or other obstacles which may be met on the march eastwards.

5. G.O.C. flank columns will communicate with the centre column daily. Reports to be sent to the centre column for transmission to the Lieutenant-General commanding."

Provision was also made to the following effect with regard to supplies:—

(i.) Current day's forage and rations were to be on the horse and two additional days' biscuit and groceries in the wallets.

(ii.) One day's forage and two days' biscuit and groceries in regimental wagons.

(iii.) As by the detour proposed the force would be cut off from supplies for some time, arrangements were made that all indifferent horses should be taken on as pack animals loaded with 180 lbs. of oats, and that three days' supplies should be taken in the divisional supply column.

he now had a strong force near him in the Western Transvaal, Pretoria was adequately garrisoned,* and Buller was within reach on the Natal line. Under these circumstances the slight risk of French's strong force being cut off was worth running, all the more as the intelligence from Delagoa Bay indicated that on the first sign of Lord Roberts's advance the only thought of the Boers was to retreat as quickly as possible on Machadodorp. If French had been allowed to carry out his plan, at the worst the Boers would have escaped too quickly for him to be able to get behind them; but the chances were against this, for Botha's own flight was hampered by the train of women and children who had suddenly been thrust upon him. French, moreover, would not have been delayed so much as he was near the railway, if he had gone over the open country further south. Lord Roberts, however, was so bent upon the mere acquisition of the railway that he had no definite intention of trying to capture the Boer army. After the 23rd, therefore, the advance to Middelburg simply consisted of his ordinary tactics, whereby the two flanks, slightly in advance of and quite close to the main body, pushed away the opposition which might have impeded it. Here, as on more than one occasion, Lord Roberts thought more of gaining ground than of striking a vital blow at his adversary's army.

July 24. French makes a short turn north to the railway.

In consequence of the orders he received on the evening of the 23rd, French gave up his original intention of moving as far east as the Olifant's River, and made a short turn north against Dirksen's commando and the German corps, who were on the heights south-east of Brugspruit Station, covering Botha's retreat. Dirksen delayed French long enough for his purpose, and then followed the rest of Botha's army. That night Hutton's scouts discovered that Balmoral had already been given up, whereupon French and he, on their own responsibility, as they were beyond communication with the Commander-in-Chief, determined to press the retreating Boers instead of unnecessarily occupying Balmoral and

* For further security Hickman's brigade had on the 22nd been detached from Hamilton's column and sent back to Pretoria.

Brugspruit. On the 25th Gordon * captured two drifts over the Olifant's River; the Carabineers, assisted by Dickson with the 7th Dragoon Guards and "O" Battery, drove away the last Boer rearguard of Viljoen's men who were intrenched in the Witbank colliery; Hutton patrolled the line between Balmoral and Brugspruit, and bivouacked on the left of the cavalry.†

Boers seen retreating through Middelburg.

That evening Generals French and Hutton, standing at Naauwpoort Drift, over the Olifant's River, could see the long string of Boer fugitives and wagons passing down into the dip to Middelburg and then over the rise beyond. Pursuit was then out of the question; the sun was setting, the horses were tired out after a long day, and the drift was a bad one. But it must have been with no slight regret that French watched the Boer flight, for, if he had been allowed to carry out his scheme, he might well have added another capture to his successes.

July 21–25. Progress of Roberts's other columns.

Meanwhile Roberts's left wing and centre had been steadily advancing. On the 21st Hamilton was attacked with some vigour on his left and rear as he was crossing the Elands River, an indication that on the north also the net had not been spread wide enough to damage Erasmus's command; by the evening of the 22nd he had joined forces with Mahon and reached Rustfontein, a few miles north of Bronkhorst Spruit station, whereupon the Boers on the line commenced their retreat without offering any further resistance. Pole-Carew started east on the 23rd; on the 25th Hamilton was occupying Balmoral, while behind him the Guards were three miles east of the Wilge River, and Stephenson's brigade on the Wilge River and Bronkhorst Spruit.

It was fortunate that there was no need for rapid movement after the 25th, for all that night a storm raged so furiously that the roads became almost impassable and the transport animals died in hundreds from the cold and ex-

* On the 24th Dickson was ordered to detach the 8th Hussars to work with the 1st Cavalry Brigade, and on the 25th the 14th Hussars also.

† Hutton's two infantry battalions (1st Suffolks and 2nd R.I. Fusiliers) and his two 5-inch guns dragged by oxen had covered twenty-three miles this day, and had shown great spirit in keeping well up with the mounted troops during the three days' march.

posure.* On the 26th French and Hutton had some slight skirmishing with a few Boers south of Middelburg, which they occupied on the 27th. At this point Roberts decided that a halt should be made until Buller was ready to co-operate from the south, and the railway could be repaired sufficiently to bring up supplies for a fresh start.† He was also glad of the opportunity to devote his whole attention to the capture of de Wet and to the general pacification of the Western Transvaal.

July 27. Middelburg occupied. Halt in the advance.

Further south Clery had been gradually making his way towards Heidelberg. On the 22nd July Roberts, thinking that Clery was already at Greylingstad, pressed upon Buller the necessity of opening up the Natal line without further delay, especially since he was no longer required to assist in the advance to Middelburg. However, Clery had only reached Waterval by the 22nd, and it took him till the 24th to cover the remaining thirteen miles to Greylingstad. There he remained two days. On the 21st Major English, in command of Hart's advanced post at Zuikerbosch, had repulsed a most determined attempt of the Heidelberg commando to overwhelm him. The garrison had no guns and consisted of only two companies of the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers and ten Yeomanry troopers, with a repairing party of 110 Royal Engineers, but under Hart's directions they were admirably intrenched. The intrenchments and their own obstinacy saved the garrison, for they were surrounded for six hours by the Boers, who were in superior numbers and had two guns and a pom-pom. Finally their assailants, finding they could make no impression, retired. Hart came up with a relieving column in time to hasten their retreat, and, since the line had hardly been damaged, returned to Heidelberg after leaving two guns with Major English.

July 22–24. Clery returns to Greylingstad.

July 21. Major English beats off Boers from Zuikerbosch.

* An officer in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders also died in the night from exposure to the storm.

† The bridges over the Wilge River and Bronkhorst Spruit had been blown up by the Boers. Luckily an advance telegraph party, sent forward by Pole-Carew, were just in time to remove the blasting charges left on the Olifant's River bridge by Captain Ricchiardi of the Italian contingent.

July 28. Clery reaches Heidelberg.

But though Hart was doing useful work where he was, Roberts urgently needed him to extend the cordon which was being formed round de Wet at Vredefort,* so at last he ordered him to evacuate Heidelberg on the 28th, and proceed by train to the Orange River Colony, even if Clery had not come up to relieve him. Hart lost no time in obeying this order, and had actually left Heidelberg six hours before Clery, starting from Greylingstad on the 26th, had arrived. Two days previously the Natal line had been opened for through traffic, and Roberts at last had his second source of supply.

Causes of Buller's slow progress.

Buller's slow progress up the railway during this period is particularly remarkable. It was partly due to his excessive caution in tying down so many of his troops to the lines of communication, and partly to the cumbersome progress of his columns. He rarely used mounted troops alone during this period, and all his columns were burdened with an excessive amount of transport. Thus, while all the other troops in South Africa bivouacked in the open, even in the middle of winter, the Natal army generally carried about with them their full equipment of tents, which were a cause of delay, and required an extra supply of slowly-moving ox-wagons.†

July 21–24. Second expedition to Graskop under Hildyard.

Nearer the Natal border Buller had ordered Hildyard to make another attempt at clearing away the troublesome commandos near Graskop. The expedition was originally planned to take place simultaneously with Clery's advance to Bethal, in order to prevent Joubert from taking Clery in flank, but it was carried through in spite of Clery's recall. Buller had taken Roberts's hint that he might spare some men from Natal for more active work, and had called up Howard with three battalions‡ of Lyttelton's division and two companies of his M.I. to come under Hildyard's orders.

On the 21st July Hildyard had collected his force of about 5,000 near Sandspruit, and divided it into three

* See chap. xii., p. 421.

† In one of the staff diaries of the Natal army appears the entry one day: "Tents very wet, so did not march till 9.30 A.M."

‡ 1st King's Royal Rifles, 1st Manchesters, 2nd Gordons.

columns. Of these Coke commanded the right, Howard the centre, and Brocklehurst the left.* The Boers were holding a position extending for ten miles in a north-westerly direction from Graskop along the Rooikopjes ridge in front of Amersfoort. Their numbers were, as usual, difficult to estimate, but there were detachments of the Ermelo, Carolina, Swaziland, Piet Retief and Wakkerstroom commandos, amounting to at least 2,000 men with seven guns. On the 22nd Coke occupied Graskop with little opposition, but was heavily shelled there by some Boer guns brought boldly out into the open by their Swiss commander; by the evening, however, Coke had driven the Boer left towards Amersfoort. The other two columns had little fighting. On the 23rd Hildyard made a pivoting movement, keeping Coke at Graskop, and extending his centre and left to the north-west in order to drive the Boers east. This brought Howard and Brocklehurst, by the 24th, in front of the intrenched position on Rooikopjes. Brocklehurst was then ordered to bear round to his left and take the north-western spur of the ridge, while Howard, strengthened by the half-battalion of the Middlesex transferred from Coke's column, co-operated by a direct frontal attack. Howard carried the ridge in front of him without difficulty, but there found himself separated by a wide valley from the main Boer position on the further ridge, which Brocklehurst was to take in flank. But by 4.30 P.M. there was still no sign of Brocklehurst, who did not make a wide enough sweep, or press his attack with vigour. Then Howard's men received the order to advance across the valley

* Coke's column:—
Dorsets.
½ bn. Middlesex.
69th Battery.
Squadron 19th Hussars.

Howard's column:—
Gordons.
K.R.R.
Manchesters.
½ bn. Leicesters.
10 guns.

Brocklehurst's column:—
18th Hussars.
Squadron 19th Hussars.
½ bn. 1st Dublin Fusiliers.
½ bn. Lancashire Fusiliers.
4 Cos. M.I.
7 Guns.

with the Gordons in the firing-line, supported by the King's Royal Rifles, and covered by the 4·7 guns. The infantry made a gallant rush, and at nightfall had captured the ridge, with a loss of eighteen men to the Gordons.

This incident concluded the operations, and Hildyard, after leaving posts at Graskop and Meerzicht on the Rooikopjes ridge, returned to the railway. The capture of the lurking-place at Graskop made Buller's posts on the railway less subject to attack, while the Boer commandos retired to Amersfoort, little damaged by the encounter.

III

Review of operations in the Eastern Transvaal up to end of July.

With the end of July the first stage of the struggle in the Eastern Transvaal was concluded, and there was a pause while Roberts and Buller prepared for the final advance against the main Transvaal army. The seven weeks since Diamond Hill had not been fruitful of results. Of the two sides the Boers had, in some respects, the advantage. Saving De la Rey's success in the west, it is true they had won no victories; these could hardly be expected, considering the inferiority of their numbers. But Botha had utilized his opportunity of preparing for the guerilla warfare which he foresaw must soon come, if the fight for independence was to be continued. By sending all the commandos to fight in their respective districts he gave them a greater interest in prolonging the struggle, and greater facilities for so doing. He had had ample leisure to send up stores and war material to Lydenburg and Barberton, and had made the best use of the few weeks remaining to him of communication with Delagoa Bay. He had made no serious mistakes, although, if his communications with De la Rey had been more rapid, they might together have turned the victory of Zilikats Nek to better advantage by immediate attacks from all sides.

Boers not unsuccessful.

British successes small.

On the other side the capture of Middelburg and the opening-up of the line from Volksrust to Germiston were no great achievements as the result of seven weeks' work

with armies of about 40,000 against 8,000. Apart from the general difficulty of carrying on operations a thousand miles from the base, and particular tactical errors, such as have already been indicated, the difficulty which seems to have most hampered Lord Roberts during this period was the almost complete breakdown of his staff system, which, at best, had never been very good. Since the occupation of Pretoria Lord Kitchener, the nominal chief of the staff, was generally away from headquarters superintending urgent details, instead of setting in motion the whole military organization necessary to carry out the Field-Marshal's schemes over so wide a field of operations as South Africa. There was no one to take his place; the consequence was that Lord Roberts had to act as his own chief of the staff. Accustomed as he had been to directing operations with armies never exceeding 25,000, and thoroughly trained to be an excellent staff officer before he became a great leader in the field, Lord Roberts thought that he could now combine the functions of Commander-in-Chief and chief of the staff with an army of 200,000. But no man, even with Lord Roberts's extraordinary vitality, could do the work; he had neither time to think out his problems completely nor to issue his orders. Confusion often resulted. French, for example, was not fully aware of the Commander-in-Chief's real plan for the advance on July 17th, or even on the morning of the 23rd; and the difficulties with Buller might, to some extent, have been avoided by clearer staff directions. A proper staff system would have provided all commanders, not only with their own instructions in the clearest form, but with information as to what was occurring in other parts of South Africa. The omission to do this often made the leading seem much more unintelligent than it really was. Even the Boers with their rudimentary staff arrangements provided full and constant information for their own commanders as long as communications were open. The British generals from first to last were often ignorant of what the column nearest them was doing.

Breakdown of the staff system

The distribution of intelligence properly belongs to the intelligence branch, but at Johannesburg Lord Roberts

and of the intelligence department.

seriously impaired the efficiency of this department by leaving there Colonel Mackenzie and Major Davies, who knew South Africa well, as military governor and chief of the police respectively.* There seems little justification for this, as Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, during his too brief stay in South Africa,† had very carefully chosen the men for this branch. Colonel Hume, who now became Director of Intelligence, had so acted in Burmah, but he knew little of South Africa. The service consequently suffered. This was chiefly seen in the want of attention paid to information received. There had, for example, been ample warning at headquarters of the danger at Zilikats Nek. Again, Captain Crowe had organized a most accurate and useful intelligence branch at Delagoa Bay, but he found that its value was seriously diminished by his inability to obtain any information from headquarters as to the points upon which they wished to be enlightened; and his very accurate reports about the Boers were not acted upon as fully as they deserved.

Unfortunate breaking up of divisions and brigades.

No better instance could be found of the confusion which arose from the absence of a proper staff than the haphazard breaking up of divisions and brigades which occurred after Diamond Hill. The result was loss of cohesion, of *esprit de corps*, and of the increased value of a commander who knows exactly, from experience, the extent of his men's capacity. Much of this dislocation could have been avoided by the systematic forethought of a Berthier. Thus, when Hunter arrived at Johannesburg, not only the Tenth Division, which was working excellently as a whole, but even its brigades were broken up. Barton was left with only half his Fusilier brigade, the rest going to Hutton. Hart had half a battalion at Vryburg, one and a half at Heidelberg, while two of his battalions went to Hutton, who, in his turn, lost one of them after a week, as well as the two Fusilier battalions. In the last resort Methuen and Smith-Dorrien had to be brought into a country which Hunter's division knew, and might have kept quiet, had it been originally left there. Again, to form Ian Hamilton's new division, Hutton gave up a mounted infantry corps, MacDonald, Hart, Kelly-Kenny

* See chap. iv., p. 153. † See vol. iii., p. 337.

and Tucker each contributed a battalion to form the new infantry brigade, while Hickman's column sometimes belonged to it and sometimes was under Tucker's orders. Such instances might be multiplied. Some of the changes were, no doubt, inevitable, but a great many were owing to the fact that the Commander-in-Chief had no organizer to think out his details.

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST DE WET HUNT

July 15–17. De Wet's march from Slabbert's Nek to Lindley. He attracts a large number of Hunter's troops.

It will be remembered that on July 15 de Wet and Steyn had broken out of Slabbert's Nek with a force of 2,600 men, four guns and a Maxim, and a convoy nearly three miles long, and on the following day had held back Paget's and Broadwood's combined attack at Witklip.* During the engagement of the 16th the convoy had been trekking north-east towards the Bethlehem to Lindley road, and after marching through most of the night, had outspanned to the south-east of Lindley on the morning of the 17th. The Boer leader's object was now twofold: first to attract as many as possible of Hunter's troops from the Brandwater Basin, and secondly, to secure a means for Steyn to cross over into the Transvaal and concert further operations with President Kruger. The first object had already been to some extent gained, for as soon as Hunter heard that de Wet had escaped, he ordered Ridley to take most of his M.I. brigade† from Bethlehem and to join Broadwood in following up de Wet's trail as fast as possible. Hunter thus reduced the mounted force still left with him by one-half. Moreover, from the very first mistakes were made in the pursuit. Information had reached Hunter of the direction which de Wet was taking; but instead of sending Ridley on the direct road to Lindley on the chance of heading off the Boers into Broadwood's arms, he sent him to join forces with Broadwood. Again, whereas Broadwood might have tried to make up for de Wet's long

* See chap. ix., pp. 317 and 321–322.

† Ridley left behind with Hunter the 7th M.I. Corps under Colonel Bainbridge, and Major Lean's M.I. regiment.

start by pushing on as early as possible and leaving Ridley to follow, he waited for his reinforcements till mid-day on the 17th. When he had once started, he lost some time in picking up the trail, going first to Schietkop, south-west of Lindley, and thence, on the 18th, to Rietpoort, due east of this, whereas de Wet himself kept to the east of Lindley, and was north of both places on the evening of the 17th.

Choice of ways before de Wet for bringing Steyn to Kruger's headquarters. He decides on going by the western Free State.

De Wet now had two courses open to him by which to carry out the second of his objects, to bring Steyn to Kruger's headquarters at Machadodorp The shortest and most obvious way was through Frankfort and Greylingstad; a much longer way was to go across the Free State railway, over the Vaal by one of the drifts near Potchefstroom and thence over the Magaliesberg before turning east. At first the more direct way seemed to appeal to him; for on the 18th, after sending a patrol to Lindley, which was discovered to have been evacuated for the fifth time by its English garrison,* he turned off in a north-easterly direction to Riversdale, about twelve miles from Lindley. But here he changed his mind; the road to Frankfort and across the border was clear enough, it is true, but through his information, which was first-rate, he no doubt heard that there were plenty of English troops to head him off when he reached the Transvaal. For Hart was at Heidelberg, Buller on the Natal line, and French and Hutton between Buller and the Delagoa Bay railway. Any one of these forces would be able to delay him while Hunter sent up more troops from the south to pin him down.† He therefore determined on the longer but less dangerous route. From his previous experiences, crossing the ill-guarded railway had no terrors for him, he was well acquainted with the western side of the Free State, where his own farm was, and the English troops at present on that side were not numerous. Early on the 19th he sent ahead his convoy

* The garrison, consisting of the 2nd Bedfords and the Malta M.I., had been picked up by Colonel Ewart on his way with a convoy from Heilbron to Bethlehem. See chap. ix., p. 318, footnote *.

† On the 20th, Roberts actually ordered Clery to be ready to intercept de Wet at Greylingstad and French to be on the watch further north. See chap. xi., p. 402.

towards the railway, and divided his men into two divisions. The smaller division under Theron guarded the convoy and kept watch in the direction of Heilbron, which was held by an English garrison,* while he himself with the rest of his men kept further south to cover an attack from the direction of Lindley.

July 19. Broadwood and Little converge on de Wet's two columns.

On this day two columns of nearly 3,000 men in all, and far superior in artillery to de Wet, were converging on him. Broadwood on the previous day had intercepted Ewart's convoy, filled up his own and Ridley's supply wagons, and had taken on the 1st Derbys and two guns of the 76th Battery to guard his convoy,† so that his force now amounted to about 2,000 with fourteen guns,‡ besides pom-poms. He was marching due north towards de Wet's laager at Riversdale. The other force was the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, coming from the west. On July 10, it will be remembered,§ Hunter had sent away this brigade with "R" Battery, as he thought he could not feed them at Bethlehem. It had reached Heilbron on July 15; there General Gordon was summoned to the Transvaal to take command of the 1st Cavalry Brigade, and Colonel Little, who succeeded him, received instructions to go to Winburg by way of Kroonstad. But on the 17th a message from Lord Roberts reached Little at Rosepan ordering him to turn off towards Lindley, and co-operate with Broadwood against de Wet. On the 18th he had reached Waaihoek, after picking up on the way the 400 M.I. details whom Hunter had also detached from his force earlier in July. This addition brought up Little's command to over 800 with six guns. Unfortunately, there was no communication between the two English forces, such as efficient scouting would have secured, and the attacks were separate and inconclusive.

Broadwood engages Theron.

Broadwood found that the Boer forces had left their laager when he reached it, and hurrying on came up with

* Battalion C.I.V., Provisional Battalion, 100 Eastern Province Horse, and two naval 4·7 guns, all under Colonel Mackinnon.

† See chap. ix., p. 318, footnote *. This convoy had sighted de Wet before meeting Broadwood.

‡ He and Ridley had "O" and "P" batteries R.H.A.

§ See chap. ix., p. 319; the strength of the brigade was about 400.

Theron and the convoy about 2 o'clock at Palmietfontein, twenty miles north of Lindley; then a running fight took place for about eight miles, Broadwood's brigade being in the centre and Ridley's M.I. on either flank. Broadwood's guns drove on the Boers from position to position, and Ridley's M.I. worried their flanks, but Theron rejoined his convoy, which had hurried on, about dusk, having sustained little damage himself, but having inflicted some on Ridley's West Australians. The pursuit then ceased. In the morning of the same day de Wet's own division, twelve or fifteen miles away, met Little coming towards him at Paardeplaats, seven miles north-west of Lindley, and being in superior force, was able to surround him. However, the attack was not pressed hard, and though firing went on till dusk, the casualties on the English side were only thirteen, and on the Boer side five. During the night de Wet, satisfied with having kept Little apart from Broadwood, rejoined Theron with the convoy, which had reached Paardekraal.

Little engages de Wet himself.

It certainly is remarkable that Little's and Broadwood's forces should have been so close to one another on this day and yet unaware of one another's positions, and that for the next three days they never were in communication, although orders were received by both commanders from Lord Roberts. De Wet, on the other hand, had such an excellent service of intelligence by means of his two scouting corps under Theron and Scheepers that, though during the next three days both Little's and Broadwood's patrols were occasionally in touch with him, he was able to shake them off and to reach the railway on the night of the 21st. Here, as usual, he divided his force, crossing himself at Serfontein and sending Theron a little further down to cross at Honigspruit. A train passed as de Wet was crossing, but it was thought better to let it go by until the huge convoy was well over; Theron, however, being untroubled with baggage, stopped another train, took the men on board prisoners, and secured a very useful supply of food and ammunition. The two Boer forces then reunited at Mahemspruit, a farm about six miles west of Kopjes Station, and

English scouting compares unfavourably with de Wet's.

21st July. De Wet crosses the railway.

Danie Theron's *Verkennings Korps.*

indulged in some natural self-congratulation on their achievements. Theron was here declared a commandant by de Wet, and the promotion was well deserved. One of Danie Theron's first exploits, it will be remembered, was to crawl through the British lines at Paardeberg with a message from de Wet to Cronje.* During the halt at Bloemfontein he had often gained much useful information by penetrating Lord Roberts's lines at the head of his small band of scouts. He had retreated into the Transvaal with the main Boer forces on Lord Roberts's advance, but after the capture of Pretoria had come back to the Free State on Steyn and de Wet's invitation. By that time he had reorganised his corps and brought its numbers up to two hundred. Men of almost every nationality went to form Theron's *Verkennings Korps*, which included, besides Boers and Hollanders, Germans, Russians, Frenchmen, a Bulgar, a Greek, a Levantine, a Turk, and an Algerian Arab. In spite of these heterogeneous elements, this corps was one of the best disciplined of the Boer forces, for Theron himself, though more sociable and a better comrade to his men, was as strict a disciplinarian as de Wet himself. They were picked men, for Theron would allow no skulkers, and ready for any act of daring; at the same time they took life easily, and were altogether a more jovial crew than the ordinary burghers. They travelled light, with one Maxim and only three trollies for equipment, but each man had a spare horse.

July 24. De Wet reaches Reitzburg.

On the 22nd and 23rd de Wet, continuing his journey north-west, passed through Wonderheuvel and Vlakkuil, and on the 24th, after a week of flat, monotonous country, arrived at the hilly district south of the Vaal in the neighbourhood of Reitzburg. Broadwood had arrived at Roodewal on the railway on the 22nd, and hearing that de Wet was at Mahemspruit, had tried to reach him, but had given up the attempt owing to bad drifts and the necessity of renewing his supplies. He then returned to Rhenoster River Bridge, filled up his wagons, and pushed on to Shepstone Drift, west of the railway, on the 23rd. On the same day Little crossed the line at Roodewal, and here, for the first time, came into

* See vol. iii., p. 481.

communication with Broadwood. On the 24th a sharp little encounter took place between the opposing forces. Legge's M.I. Corps, and Dawson, with 150 of Roberts's Horse and of the Ceylon M.I., who formed the advance guard to Broadwood's column, had been sent forward to cut off some Boer wagons at Stinkhoutboom, between Vredefort and Reitzburg. They secured the wagons, but de Wet, who was close by, heard the firing, and brought up all the men he could find, with two guns, to hold the semicircular screen of hills in front of Reitzburg. The mounted infantry found themselves unable to hold their ground against the bold attack of Theron's Scouts, but they retreated in good order with the wagons, chiefly owing to the excellent spirit shown by Kitchener's Horse, under Major Cookson. General Broadwood, coming up later with the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, covered their retirement, and, when he was reinforced by Little's Brigade, drove the Boers behind the hills.*

Action at Stinkhoutboom.

De Wet had chosen his lurking place with his usual skill. His main laager on the farm Rhenosterpoort, near Reitzburg, was protected from the east by the forbidding semicircle of hills at Stinkhoutboom, and also gave him command of a convenient crossing-place over the Vaal at Schoeman's Drift. For twenty miles south of Stinkhoutboom he had outposts on the ridge line ending at Rhebokfontein, a prominent hill situated in a loop of the Rhenoster River and commanding a drift on each side of the loop. Immediately after the engagement of the 24th, Broadwood placed Ridley with his 800 M.I. and "P" Battery at Vleyspruit, near the main laager, while he watched the country from Wonderheuvel as far as Rhebokfontein with his own and Little's brigades, the Derbys, and the rest of his artillery. Thus, although de Wet was cut off from escape to the east, there was nothing at first to prevent him from crossing the Rhenoster River by a drift west of Rhebokfontein; nor, indeed, would he have found any obstacle in crossing the Vaal. Methuen and Smith-Dorrien were not

July 25–Aug. 6. De Wet at Rhenosterpoort on the Vaal with outposts further south.

* The casualties in the M.I. were 39; the Boers only admitted 7, but they were probably greater.

far south of the Magaliesberg, Potchefstroom* was but lightly held, Klerksdorp had fallen, and Liebenberg could reach him a hand from his position in the Gatsrand. In fact, the men from Potchefstroom, who had come with him, easily went over to join their countrymen with Liebenberg. But the probability is that de Wet, who rarely made plans for a long time ahead, originally had no intention of going into the Transvaal himself, but merely wished to secure a safe passage for Steyn before breaking back across the Rhenoster into the Free State. For some time he was content to rest in his safe retreat, collecting supplies from the district and bringing back to commando the burghers who had given up arms so readily when Methuen marched through the country.

Raid by Theron on the railway.

But he was not entirely idle. His outposts, especially near Rhebokfontein, had several encounters with Broadwood's patrols, and on July 25 he created a diversion by sending Theron's corps to Rhenoster Kop, a high hill about twelve miles south of Rhebokfontein, which dominates the neighbouring country, and is apt for concealment owing to the thick woods round its base. From Rhenoster Kop Theron made two more attacks on the railway; in the first, on July 28, at America Siding, he was unsuccessful; but on August 2 he stopped a train at Holfontein, between Kroonstad and Ventersburg, and took a few prisoners.† On returning to Rhenoster Kop Theron found Knox there, had a fight, in which he lost some wagons and cattle, and reached de Wet's laager safely on August 6.

Lord Roberts's plans for capturing de Wet.

By this time Lord Roberts had come to the conclusion that the capture of de Wet was as necessary for a speedy termination of the war as the defeat of Botha, and he was free, after the capture of Middelburg on July 27, to con-

* At Potchefstroom the garrison consisted of 2 guns 78th F.B., 40 I.Y., 150 Royal Scots Fusiliers, 150 Royal Welsh Fusiliers, under the command of Major Alan Gough. The garrison of Klerksdorp, composed of one squadron of the Kimberley Mounted Corps, had surrendered on July 24. See chap. x., p. 362.

† The American Consul-General and Lord Algernon Gordon-Lennox with Lord Roberts's mails were also on board this train. These were allowed to go free by Theron, who was under the impression that the latter was the Consul-General's servant.

centrate his energies on the former object. His plan was to complete the semicircle round de Wet on the south and force him across the Vaal into the arms of Methuen; and, in order to ensure its energetic execution, he sent Kitchener to take command of the driving columns.

Aug. 6. De Wet's retreat into the Free State cut off.

During the first week in August, troops had been poured into the north-western Free State, and by August 6 de Wet had been forced to draw in all his outposts to his main laager. On that day the semicircle to the south of him was completed. Ten miles north-west of Rhebokfontein the Colonial Division, which had left the Brandwater Basin on July 28, and had arrived by forced marches at Kroonstad on August 3, was holding Winkel's Drift over the Rhenoster River. On August 1 Hart's garrison from Heidelberg * had reached Wilgebosch Drift, where it had been reinforced by Captain Grant's two naval 4·7-inch guns from Krugersdorp, and the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers from Bloemfontein. C. E. Knox, ordered up from Kroonstad with 2,000 men and six guns † on August 1, was holding a drift over the Rhenoster River, between the Colonial Division and Broadwood, who had moved to Rhebokfontein Hill on Hart's left. Little, at Vleyspruit, had relieved Ridley, who was moving up towards Groot Eiland and the drift across the Vaal at Parys, while the Canadian Regiment was holding Schiet Kop, between Ridley and the railway. Altogether de Wet had 11,000 troops arrayed against him south of the Vaal, and blocking all access to the Free State.

North of the Vaal the net had not been so closely drawn. On July 23 Methuen had been recalled from Rustenburg owing to one of Liebenberg's attacks on the Potchefstroom railway.‡ Leaving Colonel Kekewich with the Loyal North Lancashires at Olifant's Nek, he reached the railway near

North of the Vaal the net not so closely drawn.

* Hart's force: 200 Marshall's Horse, Co. I.Y., 28th F.B., G section pom-poms, half 2nd Somerset L.I., 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, and section 10th Ammunition Column. See chap. xi., p. 385.

† General Knox's force: 250 of the R.I.R., and Malta M.I., 1st Oxfordshire L.I., 3rd Royal Scots, 5 guns of the 17th F.B., and one pom-pom.

‡ See chap. x., p. 357.

Bank Station on the 25th, left Smith-Dorrien there, and continued his march to Potchefstroom.* On the way he had a running fight with Boers watching the railway and the road from the hills near Welverdiend, but on the 29th found Gough's little garrison still holding Potchefstroom.

Distribution of forces north of the Vaal.

The function of the forces north of the Vaal was, according to Lord Roberts's original idea, that Barton, who now had a strong garrison of 3,000 men in Krugersdorp,† should form a large base of supplies ready to be sent to any of the columns operating within reach; that Smith-Dorrien, with 1,500 men,‡ should hold the railway communication between Krugersdorp and Potchefstroom, and that Methuen's column of under 3,000 should stay at Potchefstroom, and, while clearing the country of supplies, do nothing to discourage de Wet from crossing the Vaal. By August 3, however, the columns south of the Vaal were strong enough to prevent de Wet breaking back south or east. Methuen was therefore ordered to come in closer to the Vaal and watch the crossings between Scandinavia Drift, south of Potchefstroom, and Lindeque Drift, forty miles further east, in readiness to pounce on de Wet as soon as he came over; Smith-Dorrien on the railway, Ian Hamilton and Baden-Powell, with 8,000 men, in the Magaliesberg, and Carrington's column of 2,500 in the north-west, were to be ready to support Methuen. Thus there were altogether 18,000 British troops within the sphere of operations north of the Vaal. The plan was a good one, marred, however, by the inadequacy of Methuen's force, to which was assigned the principal part of watching no less than twelve crossings between Scandinavia and Lindeque Drifts.

* Methuen's force then consisted of the remains of the 9th Brigade (1st Northumberland Fusiliers and 2nd Northamptons), 3rd, 5th, and 10th Battalions I.Y., the 4th and 20th Field Batteries, two pom-poms, and two howitzers.

† Four guns 78th F.B., 80 Eastern Province Horse, 19th Co. I.Y., 7th Co. R.E., 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers, 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers, and the 1st Gordons, who were taken over from Smith-Dorrien in exchange for the C.I.V. battalion which had been moved up from Heilbron.

‡ Smith-Dorrien had the Shropshire L.I., the C.I.V. battalion, two guns 20th F.B., two howitzers, and 120 of the 15th Battalion I.Y., sent to him by Lord Methuen on August 2.

After he had been rejoined by Theron, on August 6, de Wet, finding himself hemmed in on the south, decided to try an incursion into the Transvaal as a means of escape, especially as it was no longer safe to send President Steyn there without a strong escort. But as it would certainly be difficult to persuade the Free Staters to leave their own country, he first sent their precious baggage wagons over the river, knowing that they would be sure to follow. He chose Schoeman's Drift, the obvious crossing, immediately behind his position. Methuen's column was none too large, in any case, to hold de Wet, and unfortunately, although he had discovered by a patrol on the 3rd that de Wet was on the move near Schoeman's Drift, he had been ordered by Kitchener on this very day to go with his main body to Scandinavia Drift, lower down stream, and on the 6th to send a detachment* to Winkel's Drift on the Rhenoster River in support of the Colonial Division. Thus there was nobody to interfere with de Wet's crossing.

Aug. 6. De Wet crosses the Vaal at Schoeman's Drift.

As soon as Methuen, at Scandinavia Drift, heard of de Wet's crossing, he sent for Gough's detachment in Potchefstroom to join him, and hurried east with his whole force.† On the 7th he reached Tygerfontein, north of Schoeman's Drift, where three successive ridges separated him from the Vaal. Behind these ridges de Wet was marshalling his long train of wagons for his next march to Venterskroon. The north bank of the Vaal was well suited for his elusive tactics, as the road winds almost unperceived through the intricate hills, which in places leave barely room for it between them and the river. As soon as Methuen arrived at Tygerfontein an engagement followed with a detachment of Boers, whom de Wet had posted to hold his rear. The Boers were gradually driven back from one ridge to another, chiefly by the guns and Gough's

Aug. 7. Methuen comes upon his rear-guard at Tygerfontein.

* Three companies 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, two guns, and one squadron I.Y., under Colonel Money.

† On the 2nd August he had sent Colonel Younghusband with the 3rd battalion I.Y. and a wing of the Northamptons to Vermaas Drift, fifteen miles west of Scandinavia Drift; but this force had rejoined the main body on August 6.

Fusilier detachment, until Methuen commanded the road from Schoeman's Drift and Venterskroon to Potchefstroom.* But de Wet had secured his way in a north-easterly direction by sending forward men to hold the pass at Buffelshoek above Venterskroon, where the road passed between two chains of hills. Meanwhile the forces south of the Vaal had been moving up. Kitchener was most anxious, on hearing that de Wet was turning north-east, to block Lindeque Drift, where he expected him to recross the Vaal and return into the Free State. This was unfortunate, for if Ridley, who was near Parys, had crossed over by that drift he might have cut off de Wet's escape by getting in front of him at Buffelshoek, whereas by going to Lindeque he missed him. Little reconnoitred the hills about Reitzburg and found them still held, Broadwood and Hart were moved up in the same direction, Knox and the Colonial Division towards Scandinavia Drift.

The columns south of the Vaal come up.

On the 8th de Wet contented himself with securing his position at Buffelshoek and arranging his convoy so that part could move south-east and the other part north-east. Methuen, who had temporarily lost touch with de Wet, stayed for the day at Tygerfontein, waiting for the detachment which had been sent to Winkel's Drift to rejoin him. On the 9th, on reports of de Wet's activity near Leeuwfontein, between Tygerfontein and Buffelshoek, he sent forward his Yeomanry under Lord Chesham. Colonel Younghusband, in command of the leading battalion, undeterred by flanking parties of Boers, who tried to ride round him, made a succession of spirited dashes against the rearguard and the convoy moving north-east, drove them on in confusion, and captured six wagons and a quantity of stock. But by sending part of the convoy under Theron along the south-easterly road de Wet confirmed the impression among the other British commanders that the Boers meant to recross the Vaal. Broadwood, Hart, and Little were pushed on towards Lindeque Drift, which Ridley crossed on the same day. During their march they actually saw and fired at a part of Theron's convoy,

Aug. 8, 9. De Wet puts the British commanders off the scent.

* Methuen's casualties were 17 on this day.

which was trekking along the northern bank of the Vaal near Parys.

Next day all the pursuing columns again lost touch. De Wet made a feint of going off north-east to the Losberg, but when he had been rejoined by Theron a little south of it, he headed straight north for the Gatsrand, where Liebenberg was holding the passes for him. Kitchener's columns under Hart, Broadwood, Little, and Ridley, crossed the Vaal at Lindeque and made a direct line north well to de Wet's right; Methuen kept to de Wet's left rear, his function being to prevent the Free Staters turning north-west towards De la Rey on the Elands River. Knox was left south of the Vaal.

Aug. 10. The pursuit is again taken up.

Then began a wild nightmare of pursuit. The British columns, now hot on the trail, now missing it and cutting off corners in the attempt to find it again, kept stolidly trudging along, with now and then a brief interval, not so much for repose as to take their bearings or to wait for the necessary supplies. Occasionally an obstinate rearguard or a glimpse of the last wagons of the Boer convoy seemed to give them the longed-for chance of having a blow at the inscrutable enemy, but it was only a rearguard or only the last wagons, and after an inconclusive skirmish the stolid trudging would begin all over again, until at last the men began to feel that life was one stupid, almost ceaseless march. The Boers, on their side, had no less weary work, plodding on often through the night as well as the day. Most of them felt more dead than alive, and had not even the will left to rebel against the plans of their imperious leader. If they halted at a friendly farmhouse or by a pleasant stream during the day to snatch a moment of rest or a mouthful of food, as often as not the oxen and horses had hardly been outspanned, when the cry "Opzaal, opzaal, Khaki's coming," * would be carried through the laager, and the tired beasts would have to be put back into the wagons, and the dreary trek would begin anew. One advantage the Boers had over the English, that the farmers in the country

Description of the chase.

* Opzaal, "saddle up." The generic slang for the English soldier in the Boer commandos was "khaki," *tout court.*

traversed were nearly all friendly. Consequently, as Methuen had done very little in the way of devastation, the Boers, coming first, everywhere obtained plentiful supplies.

Aug. 10, 11. De Wet crosses the Gatsrand and the railway.

On August 10 Methuen went up to Buffelsdoorn at the foot of the Gatsrand and found de Wet disappearing through it; a slight engagement ensued with Liebenberg's rearguard, who made little stand, but the pursuit was not followed up; on the same day the Colonial Division, who had crossed into the Transvaal by Scandinavia Drift, came up to Methuen's left rear. While the pursuing columns were halting south of the Gatsrand, de Wet and Steyn travelled all night, crossed the railway near Welverdiend, where some Transvaalers had blown up a culvert, and reached the drift on the Mooi River by daybreak on the 11th, having successfully out-distanced the forces behind him and also avoided Smith-Dorrien, who was lying in wait for him on the north of the Gatsrand. Smith-Dorrien had been busily occupied on the railway for the last fortnight, spreading out his troops between Bank Station and Frederikstad; on July 30 a train had been wrecked at Frederikstad; on the 31st there had been a skirmish with Liebenberg, and another on August 4; the telegraph line was occasionally cut; small fights occurred almost daily on the line, and Potchefstroom had now been evacuated and reoccupied by the Boers. On the 8th Lord Roberts, expecting de Wet to strike due north from the Gatsrand, told Smith-Dorrien to concentrate all his troops at Bank Station. Smith-Dorrien protested against leaving a gap between Bank and Frederikstad, but unsuccessfully, and on August 9 he returned to Bank. Unfortunately, though he sent patrols on the 10th to watch the Gatsrand from the north, they were not strong enough to stop de Wet, while the withdrawal of all troops from the neighbourhood of Welverdiend had left the Boer general free to cross the railway undisturbed. Thus on the 11th Smith-Dorrien found himself in the same position as all Methuen's and Kitchener's troops, behind instead of in front of de Wet.

Aug. 12. Methuen cuts off part of de Wet's rearguard.

Methuen, however, was indomitable; directing the Colonial Division and his own to Frederikstad, he there took in supplies, left behind his infantry under Douglas to

follow him up with a convoy, and started off again at 3 A.M. on the 12th with his Yeomanry and guns and the Colonial Division in a north-westerly direction, leaving a message for Kitchener, who had stopped at Welverdiend, to come up on his right with his own troops, and Smith-Dorrien's brigade. De Wet was now heading in a westerly direction towards Ventersdorp, and, though he had a good start by this time, Methuen, by setting out from Frederikstad, was able to cut off a corner and come up with him a little north of Syferbult. Here Methuen shelled the rearguard so vigorously and pressed the Boers so close, that de Wet had to abandon a gun captured at Stormberg, some wagons, and sixty of the English prisoners travelling with his convoy. Next day Methuen started as usual about 3 o'clock A.M., again came up with de Wet's rearguard, and saw him heading off in the direction of Olifant's Nek.

Aug. 13. De Wet heads off towards Olifant's Nek, with Methuen in close pursuit.

Now at last it seemed as if he must be captured. It will be remembered that the Loyal North Lancashires had been withdrawn from Olifant's Nek when Ian Hamilton brought away Baden-Powell from Rustenburg.* But when on August 11 Lord Roberts ascertained that de Wet was trekking north, he ordered Ian Hamilton to leave Baden-Powell at Commando Nek, to send off a detachment to re-occupy Olifant's Nek, and to take up a position with his main force in the Hekpoort Valley, between the two neks. Lord Methuen knew that Olifant's Nek was supposed to be held; when therefore he saw de Wet going in that direction he concluded that he would be turned back, and would then try either to join De la Rey on the Elands River or to go through the Magato Pass to Rustenburg. Relying, therefore, on Ian Hamilton's having a detachment at Olifant's Nek, he made a sweeping movement to the west so as to catch de Wet as he moved thence either north or west, and asked Kitchener to hold the country on his right between the Mooi River and the Magaliesberg.

Aug. 14. De Wet escapes through Olifant's Nek.

Starting at 1 A.M. on the 14th Methuen had a hard march until past noon, when he finally brought up at Doornlaagte. Here he commanded all the roads to the west and north-

* See chap. x., p. 361.

west, and was only a few miles from Magato Nek. Kitchener, with the other pursuing columns, was near Quaggafontein, covering the road south; and in the morning Methuen had heard that Broadwood was engaged with de Wet's rearguard on the direct road to Olifant's Nek. Thus all seemed turning out as had been planned. But just as Methuen's column was reaching camp, tired after their twenty-seven miles' march, a native came in to report that de Wet's last wagons had been seen going through Olifant's Nek early in the morning. Olifant's Nek had not been held, and de Wet and Steyn had escaped.

Ian Hamilton had not closed the nek.

Ian Hamilton had advanced to Zeekoehoek, at the end of the Hekpoort Valley, on the 12th, but, instead of sending to hold the nek, thought that he would protect the approach to it sufficiently by simply continuing his own movement westwards. This decision was most unfortunate, the more so as Ian Hamilton's advance westwards was very slow. Being to some extent misled by the information telegraphed from Pretoria, which in several instances post-dated de Wet's movements by twenty-four hours, he only reached a point south-east of the nek on the evening of the day when de Wet slipped through.

Aug. 15. News arrives that Hore is still holding out at Elands River.

The one ray of consolation for the disconsolate British commanders, Methuen, Kitchener, Broadwood, Little, Hart, and Ian Hamilton, after this inglorious end to their long chase, was the news, which arrived on August 15, that Hore was still holding out at Elands River.

Aug. 16. Hore relieved after eleven days' siege.

It will be remembered that after Carrington's retreat to Zeerust on August 5 and Baden Powell's to Rustenburg on the 6th, Lord Roberts had given up all hope of saving this garrison.* But on the 13th a runner from Colonel Hore had arrived at Crocodile Pools on the Mafeking Railway, announcing that he had not surrendered. On hearing this the Field-Marshal ordered Kitchener to take part of his force to relieve him, and Carrington to re-occupy Zeerust and to meet Kitchener with a train of supplies. Carrington set out on the 14th with a column 2,000 strong and was considerably delayed by skirmishing parties of Boers. Kitchener started on the 16th

* See chap. x., p. 361.

from Quaggafontein with Little's, Broadwood's, and Smith-Dorrien's Brigades. After Carrington had come up and gone away again on August 5, the garrison, though apparently left to their fate, would hear nothing of surrender, but made up their minds to fight as long as they had ammunition and strength to use it. Luckily, they were well provided with food, and the Boers, as usual in their sieges, were content to sit round and fire at them without seriously attempting to rush the place as they should have done. The garrison also kept up their spirits by sudden raids at night on adventurous Boers or guns that came too near; in one of these raids Lieutenant Annat, of the Australians, who was killed next day, specially distinguished himself. Thus, as at Wepener, it became a game of patience for the garrison, dissimilar only in this, that at Elands River there was no promise of support given to buoy up the garrison with hope. However, on August 16, after eleven days' siege, De la Rey moved away on news of the approaching relief columns, and Lord Kitchener rode in to set free the garrison.

Fine defence made by the garrison.

This siege, like that of Wepener, was especially a Colonial triumph; there the garrison had been chiefly Cape Colonials, here the majority were Australians of Carrington's first brigade, the rest being Rhodesians, and it would be difficult to praise overmuch the determination and fine spirit shown by these Colonials in their first opportunity of distinguishing themselves as a corps. Every soldier who saw the place afterwards expressed surprise that they could have held out so long, and it is, therefore, the more creditable to them to have done so when every hope of relief seemed entirely cut off; while, at a time when surrenders and retreats were not sufficiently rare, the example shown by these splendid men was even more important than the position they held.

Aug. 16, 17. Magato and Olifant's Neks retaken by Methuen and Ian Hamilton.

On the same day that Kitchener relieved Hore's garrison Methuen, though with a heavy heart, went off to see what could be done by going through Magato Nek. But when he had dispersed Liebenberg's men who were holding it, he was suddenly ordered by Lord Roberts to go west and take charge of Mafeking and the Marico district. Ian Hamilton, on the

17th, retook Olifant's nek, and on the following day at Crocodile Drift came up with de Wet's rearguard, which he shelled and drove further north.

De Wet near Commando Nek.

De Wet, after passing through Olifant's Nek, had for a moment meditated a raid on Pretoria, but afterwards, on finding that Baden-Powell was holding Commando Nek, he contented himself with a humorous suggestion that he should surrender, and then went off north towards the bushveld.

De Wet's force split up and dispersed

Near the Crocodile Drift he split up his forces. Already, when still south of the Magaliesberg, he had left Theron's scouts behind at the Mooi River, feeling that they could do no more good, and that they badly needed a rest, as the hardest work during the retreat had fallen upon them. Here they stayed for a week, quite hidden from the English columns that passed near them; they then emerged and performed a succession of bold buccaneering feats, blew up the line, captured a train, made a successful attack on the prison at Van Wyk's Rust, and an unsuccessful one on the Johannesburg Waterworks, until finally their activity came temporarily to an end with the death of Danie Theron, who was killed on the Gatsrand when fighting in support of Liebenberg. Of those who had gone beyond the Magaliesberg, Steyn went with a small escort round the north of Lord Roberts's lines, and after an adventurous journey,* reached Machadodorp on August 25, just before the Transvaal Government was leaving for Nelspruit; the bulk of the Free Staters, with the remains of their convoy, were put under the command of Commandant Steenekamp of Heilbron, who was to lead them through the bushveld towards Nylstroom; de Wet himself, with General Philip Botha, Commandant Prinsloo and 200 men, and Scheeper's corps of thirty scouts, turned back towards the Free State. When de Wet's party came back to Commando Nek they found it guarded by the Border Regiment left there by Ian Hamilton, while the Argyll and Sutherland Regiment were at Zilikats Nek, and Kitchener was at

* He had a very near escape of capture at Pienaars River, where, after a bathe and a breakfast with Grobler's commando, he escaped just in time to avoid Paget's and Plumer's columns as they came up to attack Grobler.

Wolhuter's Kop on his return journey from Elands River. He thus seemed caught between three forces, but he eluded them all. Almost in full view of his enemies he climbed over to the south of the Magaliesberg by a precipitous path west of Commando Nek, whence, without further adventure, he returned to his old camp at Rhenosterpoort, after a hasty visit to Potchefstroom, now no longer in the hands of the English.

British forces also dispersed.

Before de Wet had reached the Free State on his return journey the columns engaged in his pursuit had been dispersed. Carrington had some fighting in the neighbourhood of Ottoshoop and Zeerust until the end of the month, when he was sent back to Rhodesia. Methuen took his place in command of operations in the Western Transvaal. Hart, Broadwood, the Colonial Division and Little were severally ordered to Krugersdorp, which none of them reached without molestation on the way from parties of De la Rey's commandos. Kitchener returned with Smith-Dorrien through the upper road to Pretoria by Rustenburg. Ian Hamilton and Baden-Powell, reinforced by Paget, who had arrived at Pretoria from the Free State on August 15, chased Steenekamp's Free Staters and Grobler's Transvaalers as far as Warmbaths on the Pietersburg line.

Results of de Wet's escape.

Thus ended the first great de Wet hunt. The Boer leader had not gained anything materially by his successful escape; on the contrary, he had lost wagons, a gun, and many men, and had temporarily dissipated his force. But he had kept up his prestige, and had again shown the Boers how easy it was to maintain one of the most wearying forms of war with an enemy nominally in possession of the country; moreover, he had helped to renew their courage after the great blow of Prinsloo's surrender. His success was due partly to the mistakes of his adversaries, but also in great measure to his own fiery rapidity of decision, his mother wit in seeing how to turn an awkward situation, and his knowledge of human nature, both Boer and British.

Good spirit shown by the British soldiers and by Methuen.

The failure of the British troops was certainly not due to want of energy, pluck or persistence on the part of the generals or the men under them. It is especially in such

long disappointing tasks that the sterling merits of the British soldier come out. Many of the men were marching in rags and with hardly any boots; there was little sleep, often no food or water at the camping places, and hardly any fighting to stir up enthusiasm; yet, by universal testimony, the spirit shown by the men was magnificent. When all did so well, it is not possible to pick out any special regiments, though a few instances of hard marching may be cited as typical. One brigade marched for forty hours out of forty-eight; another marched 115 miles in 125 hours, and some Yeomanry rode eighty-one miles in fifty-nine hours with a fight in the middle. Of the generals, Methuen was certainly the soul of the pursuit; often disappointed, he made few mistakes, and never for a moment would he let his quarry go. What little success was achieved was solely due to his dogged tenacity.

Bad field intelligence on the British side.

The final scene of disappointment was, no doubt, the result of Ian Hamilton's neglect to close Olifant's Nek. But the underlying cause was a much more far-reaching one, the extraordinarily bad scouting and field intelligence on the English side. At the very outset the inability of Little and Broadwood to get into touch with one another when they were so close together is remarkable. Again, on August 6, though de Wet was almost hemmed in by his enemies, he crossed the Vaal absolutely undetected and undisturbed. Methuen, in his turn, was never, when the pursuit first began, more than a few miles from de Wet, but on more than one occasion he lost the scent; Smith-Dorrien, if he had been properly served by scouts, could have delayed de Wet as he crossed the Gatsrand long enough for Methuen to come up behind him; and Kitchener's columns south of the Vaal wasted at least a day going up to Lindeque in complete ignorance of de Wet's position, when they might, if properly informed, have crossed at Parys and caught him at Buffelshoek. This defect of intelligence was partly, no doubt, due to the fact that all the farmers were in league with de Wet, but also very largely to the entire absence of any organised system of scouting. The fact remains that de Wet would have been caught if the British forces could have found out a little sooner where he

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was; and this, with a proper system of intelligence, would have been done. Later on in the war such a system was developed from the necessities of the case; but the later scouts who were so successful under Wools Sampson, for example, were only Kaffirs taken for the occasion, and it is doubtful if even that lesson has had any effect in producing a permanent organization and system of training suitable for future wars.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ADVANCE TO KOMATI POORT

I

Reasons for Roberts's halt at Middelburg.

NEARLY a month elapsed after the capture of Middelburg before Lord Roberts was in a position to renew the attack on General Botha. The chief reason for this delay was the chase of de Wet, which absorbed his own attention and occupied a very large proportion of his troops. Nine columns* altogether were employed in the attempt to catch the Free State leader. Of the rest, Buller had still to fight his way up from the Natal to the Delagoa Bay line; while in the Orange River Colony, although the surrender of Prinsloo at the end of July had set Clements and Paget free for work in the Transvaal, Hunter, MacDonald and Rundle were still kept well employed in the east by the escape of Olivier, and some renewed disturbance in the west had brought Settle up from Kimberley to Hoopstad. Thus, at the beginning of August, Pole-Carew, Hutton and French were alone available for the task of holding the hundred miles of railway between Pretoria and Middelburg, and for aggressive action east of Pretoria. A further cause of delay was the necessity of repairing the line to Middelburg for the supply of a force large enough to cope with Botha.

July 26. Dispositions of troops from Pretoria to Middelburg.

When Lord Roberts returned to Pretoria on July 26, he left Pole-Carew to hold the line from Bronkhorst Spruit to Brugspruit, and placed him under French's orders, who with Hutton was in Middelburg. Colonel Barker, R.E., was given

* Methuen, Ian Hamilton, Smith-Dorrien, Knox, Ridley, Broadwood, Little, Hart, and the Colonial Division. See chap. xii.

charge of communications east of Pretoria with the local rank of brigadier-general; it was his duty to guard the line as far as it was open, and to facilitate the sappers' task of making deviations in place of the broken bridges at Bronkhorst Spruit and Wilge River.* These deviations were completed so rapidly that by the 3rd August supplies could be forwarded to Middelburg, and shortly afterwards further trainfuls of Boer women and children were sent through to Botha.

Botha's men almost surround Middelburg.

After the capture of Middelburg, Botha and Viljoen had established their headquarters in the neighbourhood of Belfast, whence they spread out their commandos so as almost to envelop Middelburg. Dirksen established connection with Erasmus's Pretoria commando north of the line, while the Krugersdorp, Johannesburg, Middelburg and Germiston commandos, the Johannesburg Police and the foreign auxiliaries, were to the north-east, east, and south-east. As long as French and the troops under him had the long line of railway to defend, the Boers had a wide choice of weak points, on which to concentrate and make one of their sudden attacks. French's instructions were merely to hold himself on the defensive until the time was ripe for a further advance, but, as at Colesberg, he interpreted them in a very liberal spirit. During the first week supplies were a difficulty, as no trains came beyond the Wilge River, forty-two miles from Middelburg, and the road traction was laborious and long. This difficulty was overcome by trains improvised from trucks and locomotives commandeered from some collieries by Hunter-Weston. Next, in order to give more freedom of action to the 6,000 men in his own and Hutton's brigades, French ordered up a detachment of Pole-Carew's division to take over the post at Olifant's River Bridge. In Middelburg itself he contented himself with a garrison of seven infantry companies, a squadron of cavalry, and some dismounted cavalry details, two field guns, and a 5-inch gun, all placed under General

French's activity.

* To safeguard the railway between Pole-Carew's most westerly outpost and Pretoria, Barker was given two of Ian Hamilton's battalions, the Connaught Rangers and the Royal Irish Fusiliers, under Col. Brooke, D battery (Royal Canadian Artillery) and a small force of yeomanry.

Dickson as military governor of the town.* He then spread Hutton's troops along a line of posts fifteen to twenty miles to the north and north-east of Middelburg, and sent out a strong reconnaissance party as far as the Bothasberg, in the direction of Botha's main laager, and thence west to the drift at the junction of the Selons and Olifant's rivers. On the east, Gordon with his brigade, strengthened by the 8th and 14th Hussars, was sent forward by gradual advances to a line extending south from Wonderfontein, a station thirty miles along the railway, as far as Goedehoop Farm on the Komati River. Within three weeks, besides his garrison in Middelburg, French was holding a line round it of fifty or sixty miles. Outpost affairs with Botha's troops, especially on the east, were of frequent occurrence, and the greatest vigilance had to be exercised by the hard-worked mounted men both day and night. But French's bold tactics were amply justified. He not only obtained very accurate information as to the Boer positions, but also deceived the Boers by an impression of strength greater than he actually possessed. This success was partly due to the entire lack of enterprise shown by Botha's men, except by a few foreign scouts; but also largely to the wise caution with which French tempered his audacity. He was constantly visiting his outpost lines to be sure that no precautions had been omitted—and in this respect Hutton ably seconded him; and he had brought the signalling arrangements of the division to such a good state of organization, that each of his scattered detachments was in communication with one or more of the others.

By middle of August French holding a wide line of outposts beyond Middelburg.

Meanwhile Buller had been marching up from the Natal line. On July 29, as soon as the news had come of Prinsloo's surrender, he was asked by Lord Roberts to send up a division of infantry with cavalry to clear the country

29 July–Aug. 6. Buller prepares for his advance to the Delagoa Bay line.

* It is worth noting that at this time Standerton, which is a town of about the same size and importance as Middelburg, was being garrisoned by two battalions and six companies of infantry, a regiment of M.I., eight field guns, four howitzers, two pom-poms, two 4·7-inch guns and one 5-inch gun. However, on Aug. 5, Lord Roberts, who was in need of troops elsewhere, ordered Clery to detach a battalion and a battery from this garrison and send them up to him in Pretoria.

between the Natal and Delagoa Bay railways, and eventually to cover the right flank of the force already at Middelburg. Buller immediately made his preparations. Clery, with the Second Division, was left to hold the line from Heidelberg to Kromdraai; Hildyard, with the Fifth Division, the area between Leeuwspruit and Ingogo in Natal; while Wolfe Murray and Downing, with some unbrigaded infantry and Burn-Murdoch's cavalry, were left as before in charge of the communications in Natal and of the Drakensberg respectively. The rest of Buller's troops were concentrated at Paardekop and Meerzicht for the advance. They consisted of Lyttelton's 4th, or Ladysmith,* division of infantry, Brocklehurst's and Dundonald's cavalry, and a large force of artillery consisting of "A" Battery (the Chestnut Troop), the 21st, 42nd, and 53rd Batteries, the 61st (howitzer) Battery, two 5-inch and two 4·7-inch guns, four naval 12-pounders, and four pom-poms. The force thus available amounted to 9,000 men and forty-two guns. Some delay was necessary before a start could be made, as most of Lyttelton's division had to come from Natal, and supplies and transport to be collected for this large force marching for over a hundred miles away from any railway. Doubts were at the time freely expressed as to whether the state of his transport, which had never been reorganized on Kitchener's scheme, and was unused to leaving the railway, would permit him to keep his column supplied for the ten or fourteen days of march. But the arrangements made by Colonel Miles, the chief of Buller's staff, were so complete, that throughout the march the men hardly noticed any change from their habitual manner of living. Tents, it is true, were not taken in any great number, and the rounds of ammunition carried were reduced to the lowest possible limit, but fourteen days' groceries and biscuits, seven days' preserved meat, and eleven days' forage were provided for the whole force. The transport animals to carry this large provision were carefully picked, so that all units could be supplied with mule-transport, the only oxen accompanying the force being those of the supply columns and park. In all there were 304 ox and 457 mule-

* The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers were the only battalion of this division who had not been in Ladysmith.

wagons, in addition to ambulances, ammunition carts, Scotch carts and water carts, all of which were drawn by mules. Roberts, before his advance on Bloemfontein, had to content himself with 1,734 wagons for 30,000 troops, so that Buller was well on the safe side in having nearly a half more wagons in proportion to his numbers.

Christiaan Botha concentrates his forces to oppose him.

During the week that General Buller was organizing his transport, Christiaan Botha had been concentrating most of the scattered bands employed in threatening the railway. D. Joubert, with detachments from the Wakkerstroom, Piet Retief, Carolina and Swaziland commandos, amounting to about 1,000 men with seven guns, was on the Rooikopjes ridge to the south-west of Amersfoort, where Hildyard had left him on the 24th. Christiaan Botha himself had brought Fourie with the Heidelberg and Bethal commandos and seven more guns to cover the road from Amersfoort to Ermelo, and General Tobias Smuts was further north with his men of the Ermelo and Standerton commandos in the neighbourhood of Ermelo. Altogether Buller had to reckon with 3,000 or 4,000 Boers with fourteen guns and some pom-poms. He had been kept informed of Joubert's dispositions by a series of reconnaissances * made by the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, who had been left at Meerzicht by Hildyard after his operations of the 22nd–24th July.†

Aug. 7. Buller starts from Meerzicht

By the 7th August Buller's preparations were made, and all his troops collected at Meerzicht, ready for the advance. He had now the choice of two methods of approaching Amersfoort. The first was to hold Joubert at Rooikopjes by a demonstration on the left, while on his own right flank, where the way was clear, he pushed forward his cavalry, supported by infantry; by this plan he might be able to occupy Amersfoort before Joubert had time to retreat thither with his guns. The other was to advance with his whole force directly on Rooikopjes. He chose the latter. Joubert allowed Buller's mounted troops to seize Rooikopjes, and fell back on a ridge two miles south-west of Amersfoort.

* In a reconnaissance of the 30th July, Captain Wellby of the 18th Hussars, well known as an African explorer, was fatally wounded

† See chap. xi., pp. 408–410.

The infantry, well supported by the artillery, soon dislodged him from this ridge, and waited there for the cavalry to work round. Dundonald's brigade on the left flank was, for a short time, checked by a body of fifty Boers, who coolly rode out into the open, not in the loose skirmishing order usually adopted by them, but in close formation. For this reason they were at first taken by Dundonald's men to be some of Brocklehurst's cavalry, but the mistake was soon realized when they opened fire on the leading squadrons of Strathcona's Horse. Thereupon the Chestnut Troop, seizing their opportunity, came rapidly into action and dispersed the group. But Joubert was not seriously impeded in his retreat, and was able, after setting fire to the veld, to retire with his guns through Amersfoort before it was occupied by the British troops in the evening.* On the 8th Buller halted to allow the transport, which had been delayed at a drift, to rejoin him; the march then proceeded without further interruption. On the 12th Ermelo, which had been occupied in advance by Dundonald, was reached; on the 14th three squadrons of Strathcona's Horse were despatched to Carolina, off the line of march, where, after some fighting with about forty armed Boers, they burned all the warlike stores left in the town, and then rejoined the main column. On the 15th Buller reached Twyfelaar, just south of the Komati River, and about eighteen miles south of Wonderfontein Station. Here he came into touch with the right flank of French's cavalry at Goedehoop Farm, on the further side of the river.

and occupies Amersfoort.

By Aug. 15 at Twyfelaar, in touch with French.

Meanwhile, Christiaan Botha, finding himself unable successfully to oppose Buller's advance to this point, had again divided up his force. Taking with him the Wakkerstroom, Piet Retief and Swaziland commandos under Joubert, with seven guns, he had marched on the 13th to Amsterdam, near the Swaziland border. Here he was in a position either to threaten Buller's rear or to resume the offensive on the Natal border. Further north, Tobias Smuts, taking command of the Carolina, Ermelo, and Standerton commandos, also with seven guns, retired to Rooihoogte, the range of

Chris. Botha disperses his commandos.

* Buller's casualties on this day were 22

hills east of Carolina, ready to fall on Buller's flank, or, if need be, to guard the hilly road to Barberton. Fourie, with Christiaan Botha's two remaining commandos from Bethal and Heidelberg, took post on the Komati River, where he found himself on the left of Louis Botha's line of defence.

Louis Botha's line of defence on the railway.

The Boer commander-in-chief had now been driven back on his last line of defence for regular warfare. His first care was the protection of the Boer Government at Machadodorp, of Kruger, who had retired to the softer air of Waterval Onder, and of the last 170 miles of railway to Komati Poort, which kept the republicans in communication with the outer world. His second to defend the well-provisioned rallying-points, which had been established at Lydenburg and Barberton, in anticipation of the guerilla war. Lydenburg is forty-two miles north of the main railway line, Barberton twenty-six miles south of it; so that the country to be defended was of very considerable extent. Although the numbers at Botha's disposal were small, the mountainous character of the approaches to all these places rendered their defence comparatively easy to a people like the Boers, who knew instinctively the best points of vantage.

His right flank.

On the northern flank there were two approaches to Lydenburg from the Delagoa line: the first, up the Steelpoort valley, is flanked on the west by the Bothasberg, and on the east by the Steenkampsberg; while the second way leads past the eastern foot of the Steenkampsberg through Dullstroom. Dirksen's Boksburg commando on the Bothasberg and the Lydenburg commando on the Steenkampsberg to a certain extent commanded both these approaches. Nearer to Belfast the Middelburg and Johannesburg commandos on the western edge of the Dalmanutha plateau, which stretches as far east as Waterval Boven, were in a position to enfilade any force starting out on the Dullstroom road, and also to prevent any attempt at approaching the Dalmanutha plateau through the difficult kloofs and ravines leading up to it from Belfast. There was also a small commando to the north of Lydenburg, posted to watch for the

approach of Carrington, who was still expected at Pietersburg. In the centre, to resist any approach along the railway, a small force of Germans under Schultz was thrown forward as an outpost in Belfast itself; but the main defence of the centre was further east, near the farm Bergendal, where Botha had posted his best troops. North of the line, and to the left of the Johannesburg commando, was the Krugersdorp commando under Kemp; and south, on the farm Bergendal itself, were the remnants of the Johannesburg Police under Commandant Oosthuizen. The left of the police was prolonged by some Germans under Krieger and by Gravett's Germiston commando, who were thrown back a little and were holding the hills immediately south-west of Dalmanutha. Then on the southern flank came Fourie's two commandos, Heidelberg on the Geluk ridge, south of Bergendal, and Bethal at Frischgewaagd, both overlooking the road from Buller's camp at Twyfelaar through Van Wyk's Vley to Belfast. Finally Tobias Smuts was holding the road over the Kaapsche Hoop mountains to Barberton with two commandos, and had sent the Carolina commando further west to hold the bridge over which the Machadodorp road crosses the Komati River on its way to Carolina.

His centre.

The left flank.

The estimates of the numbers at Louis Botha's disposal to defend this long line, extending over 50 miles of country, vary in different accounts between 8,000 and 3,000. Probably the actual number, excluding those taken away by his brother Christiaan, was not more than about 5,000. There were, however, at least as many again, consisting of guards for communications, non-combatants, and skulkers along the railway line, who took no active part in Botha's defences. Of those actually at the front the proportions were about half on the left wing, south of the railway, the remaining half being distributed between the centre and the right wing.

Botha's troops in the fighting line probably about 5,000.

Now, for the first time, the four Long Toms belonging to the Boers were collected together under Botha's orders. The Lydenburg commando had one on the Steenkampsberg; one of them was with the Middelburg commando; a third on a railway truck was afterwards placed on Eland's Kop, a little

Botha's artillery.

to the south-east of Dalmanutha; and a fourth a few miles further south, near the Komati River. But, except for the artillery, the stores of ammunition were at this time running low. There were still 18,000 rounds for the four Long Toms, and 800 rounds for each of the thirty-two field-pieces which Botha was able to distribute among his commandos; but there was very little Mauser or Lee-Metford ammunition left. A German from the Spandau factory manufactured a certain amount at Machadodorp; but the difficulty was chiefly overcome by substituting, in some of the detachments, Martini-Henry rifles, for which there was still enough ammunition, for the Mausers.

His ammunition running low.

When Botha's men first occupied these positions there was considerable enthusiasm in the Boer ranks. The positions in front of Machadodorp and Lydenburg were undeniably strong, and were thought by the Boers to be almost impregnable. Although constantly retreating, they had recently suffered no serious reverses, and, although they were affected by the surrender of Prinsloo in the sister State, the successful escape of de Wet more than counterbalanced it in their minds. They were also stirred to enthusiasm by a proclamation from Botha reminding them that it rested on them whether they would lose the independence for which their fathers before them had left England's dominions; and he is said also to have threatened to submit to Lord Roberts if the burghers again ran away from their positions. For some time previously trenches had been dug near Belfast under the superintendence of Lukas Meyer; but when Botha came it was found that these trenches and defences, excellent as they were as cover, were practically useless, as they had no field of fire in front of them. Under Botha's direction, therefore, fresh trenches were dug more suitable for active defence.

Good spirits in Boer ranks at first.

But the first enthusiasm soon evaporated. The Boers became tired of waiting near the trenches for the English, who made no attacks. French's activity and incalculable movements frightened them, and though Botha and a few of the bolder spirits proposed a surprise of French's camp near Wonderfontein, while he was still weak and unsup-

Enthusiasm evaporates.

ported, the great majority of the council of war called to consider the question rejected the proposal on the ground that it would be folly to lose lives while they had safe intrenchments. And even the intrenchments that were made, good as they were, lost a great deal of their value owing to the want of provision for communication between them. Each commando was allotted a special tract of country to defend. This they intrenched admirably, but, owing either to their own indolence or to Botha's insufficient control, the intrenchments were dug as if by independent armies, having no connexion at all with one another.

But careless as the Boer general's dispositions were in this respect, the position which he had taken up was so strong by nature that there seemed a prospect, if not of defeating, at least of delaying indefinitely a much larger army than his own. Moreover, the ways of retreat to further strongholds at Barberton and Lydenburg were open behind them, and Botha had early given exact instructions as to the different lines of retreat which the various commandos should take in case of need, and as to the different rallying-points assigned to them.

But position very strong.

When Buller arrived at Twyfelaar on the 15th August, his own and French's troops together numbered about 13,000, after excluding Hutton's M.I., who were holding the outposts round Middelburg. Pole-Carew had 7,500 more within call on the line between Bronkhorst Spruit and Middelburg. French, as usual, proposed to deal with the situation by a bold attempt to cut off the Boer retreat. His idea was to make a rapid flank march on Barberton with his own and the Natal cavalry, while Buller placed himself more immediately in rear of the Boer position by an advance on Machadodorp. In order to free his own and Buller's troops for these operations, he proposed further that Pole-Carew, who now had his headquarters at Middelburg, should send some of his infantry and Hutton's brigade to take over the outpost line from De Wagen drift on the north of Middelburg through Wonderfontein to the Komati River. Lord Roberts approved of this scheme with certain modifications: his plan was to free Pole-Carew also by bringing up more

French's scheme for getting round the Boers.

modified by Roberts.

troops to hold Middelburg by the 20th; on that date French with all the cavalry was to start east, but, instead of going as far as Barberton, was to make a shorter circuit up to Nooitgedacht, only twenty miles east of Machadodorp station; on the 22nd Pole-Carew and Buller were to advance on Machadodorp with the infantry from the west and south respectively.

This postponement allowed a few days for further preparations. Buller sent his wagons in to the railway, where supplies were awaiting him, Pole-Carew gradually moved his division up to Wonderfontein, and Hutton took over Middelburg and the northern outposts. At the same time Dickson was ordered to re-form his brigade and join the rest of French's cavalry on Buller's left.

Buller modifies it still further by keeping all the cavalry under his hand.

Unfortunately, when the time came for action, Buller had persuaded the Commander-in-Chief to allow him to keep his own cavalry instead of handing it over to French. He had also come to the conclusion that the country to the east of him was too difficult to venture upon owing to the marshy character of the Komati valley and the hilly country beyond. He therefore abandoned the more ambitious programme laid down for him, and decided to move due north against the Boers on the Geluk ridges between Twyfelaar and the railway; also, instead of sending French off on his right flank, he kept him on his left flank, squeezed in between the railway and his own column, where there was little scope for mobility. On the 21st August the advance was resumed.

Aug. 21. Buller resumes advance north and reaches Van Wyk's Vley.

On the first day Buller marched eight miles to Van Wyk's Vley, covered on his left flank by French, who met with no opposition. On the right flank Buller's own troops were exposed for the last three miles of the road to the fire of the Bethal commando on the Frischgewaagd ridge. Some mounted troops, consisting of the 18th Hussars, a detachment of the 5th Lancers, and a company of M.I., failing to dislodge them, became closely engaged, whereupon a battery and half battalions of the Gordons and the Leicesters were sent up to reinforce them. The mounted troops were able to draw off, but the infantry, on advancing beyond the crest of the ridge, found the Bethal men in three strong natural

trenches on both sides of a ravine, the first close up, the second at 800 yards and the third at 1,600 yards' distance. The fire from these positions was kept up till 11 o'clock at night, when the infantry, now out of touch with the main column, retired, reaching camp about midnight.*

Aug. 22. W. Kitchener attacks Boers on the right flank.

On the 22nd French and Buller's main body halted, as the latter's transport was delayed in a drift. But an attempt was made to clear the kopjes in the Komati valley from which the trouble had come on the previous day. For this purpose Walter Kitchener was sent with two battalions of his brigade, four squadrons of the South African Light Horse and eight guns to the south-east of Van Wyk's Vley. The Bethal commando were still in the neighbourhood of Frischgewaagd and the Carolina men had hurried up from their post at the Machadodorp road bridge to prolong their line south to the Komati River. These two commandos were well posted under cover of kraals and boulders, so that Kitchener was unable to make much impression on them. However, the operation was successful, in so far that the Carolina men retired to their original position that evening, and the Bethal men moved further north. Kitchener returned to camp early in the afternoon.†

Aug. 23. Buller advances to Geluk farm.

On the 23rd Buller advanced a further five miles to Geluk Farm. This was occupied without resistance, but the ridge immediately to the north of it was found to be commanded by Boers on kopjes in front and on the right flank. Here the Heidelberg commando was waiting for Buller with Von Dalwig's six guns, while the Bethal commando had left Frischgewaagd only to place themselves again on his right flank next to the men of Heidelberg. French occupied the north-west edge of the ridge above the farm, and Buller's cavalry and some guns had some sharp work on the right of the ridge. A section of the 21st Battery, under Lieutenant Rainsford-Hannay, came under a heavy fire from three Boer guns; a duel thereupon ensued lasting for fifteen minutes, after which the Boer guns were driven off the field by Hannay's two. Four of the thirteen men in Hannay's

Artillery duel.

* Buller had 44 casualties on the 21st August.

† Kitchener had 10 casualties on the 22nd.

Boers lose Von Dalwig.

section were wounded, but the Boers suffered a more grievous loss in Von Dalwig, who had already distinguished himself against Baden-Powell and Plumer; this gallant volunteer, whilst serving a gun himself in place of a wounded artillery-man, was crippled by a shell. In the centre Howard's infantry, who were taking their turn as advance guard, had a serious mischance. A couple of companies of the Liverpool Regiment, under Captains Durham-Plomer and Hutson, were sent forward from the reserve to reinforce the fighting line on the ridge. It so happened that, when they came up, the gap which they were to fill was so wide that they could not see the companies on each side. Not knowing, therefore, when to stop, they advanced beyond the ridge until they were suddenly brought to a standstill by a furious fire from their front at about 500 yards. The companies were now out of touch with the rest of the brigade on the ridge, who could neither hear the firing, owing to a strong wind, nor see their comrades in peril. The two companies, therefore, did the best they could, maintaining so hot a fire from their exposed position that they kept the Boers to their trenches. At last, however, their ammunition began to fail and the Boers to envelop their flanks. Private Heaton was sent back to the ridge for reinforcements and ammunition; reinforcements with ammunition were sent, but never went so far as the two companies, although the gallant Heaton succeeded in returning to them. By this time it was growing dusk; all the ammunition, except such as could be collected from the dead and wounded, had been expended, and the Boers were pressing forward more boldly. Then the companies began to retire, covered by a few men under Captain Hutson and Lieutenant Watt; the Boers still pressed forward with increasing boldness, at one time coming within forty yards. At last, with great difficulty, the two companies fell back to the ridge, though not without a loss of ten killed, including Captain Durham-Plomer, forty-eight wounded, and thirty missing. Beyond the loss of brave men, however, the incident had no effect on the main issue, and Buller held his position on the ridge north of the farm.*

Two companies of the Liverpools in difficulties.

* Buller's losses on this day were 12 killed, 61 wounded, 33 missing.

So far, since the 21st August, the fighting had all been on Louis Botha's left flank, but by the 24th Pole-Carew had concentrated his division at Wonderfontein and opened the attack on the Boer centre. Sending Henry's M.I. forward to cover his left flank and front, and Pilkington with some Australian M.I. and a pom-pom to his right, he advanced with the infantry along the railway to Belfast. At first Schultz's Germans in the town showed some fight, and the guns on the ridges to the north shelled the M.I., but the Germans were few and soon abandoned the place to the Guards. Henry seized Monument Hill, an important eminence to the north, and Pilkington, after exploring the country to the south, swept round on Belfast, which by the evening was securely in Pole-Carew's possession.* On the 24th and 25th no further advance was made. Pole-Carew's infantry assisted the 12th Company R.E. in making intrenchments and gun emplacements in and round Belfast, being subjected to heavy rifle and gun fire on the 25th from their front and left flank. Buller on the right flank, twelve miles to the south, was also engaged in intrenching himself and bringing his guns into position on the ridge north of Geluk; here, too, his outposts and cavalry patrols were continually being fired at, and on the evening of the 25th the camp was shelled. French, in his cramped position, could do little; on the 24th a reconnaissance party which he sent forward to the railway was driven back and Dickson's outposts on the left of his line were fired at by a long-range gun. French's task was not an easy one, and was not made easier by General Buller's habit of withdrawing his cavalry at night behind his infantry outposts, for these outposts were not thrown out far enough to protect the camp from gun or even rifle fire. French consequently had to employ extra men from his own division on night duty, to fill the gap left between his own force and Buller's by the withdrawal of the Natal cavalry. The latter general, indeed, did not show a correct appreciation of the use of cavalry either in this respect or in the gingerly way that he always handled them in action.

Aug. 24. Pole-Carew occupies Belfast.

Aug. 25. Pole-Carew and Buller intrench themselves.

French's difficulties.

* Pole-Carew's casualties on this day were 18.

Aug. 25. Roberts arrives at Belfast. Cramped position of the British forces.

On the 25th the Commander-in-Chief had arrived at Belfast to take charge of the operations. By this time the three British forces, Buller's, French's and Pole-Carew's, were huddled up together along a line of little more than twelve miles, whereas Louis Botha's line was about fifty miles in length. Lord Roberts's original scheme for coming in behind the Boers was now obviously out of the question, since Buller had insisted on advancing straight to his front and on keeping French wedged in between himself and the railway; but there still seemed, by some rearrangement of the forces, a possibility of enveloping the Boers by Lord Roberts's favourite tactics of advanced flanks and a centre held back. His first care, therefore, was to withdraw French from his cramped position on to the left flank of the whole army, which was entirely exposed, and from which the Boers might at any moment make a swoop down upon Belfast. The duty assigned to him was to clear the Boers from the Steelpoort valley north of the railway, turn eastwards past Lakenvley through the Boer right flank, and so come down on the railway near Machadodorp. Buller was very strongly of opinion that Pole-Carew in the centre should advance due east of Belfast, but when it was found that there were no roads that way, Roberts ordered him to hold Belfast and move with the rest of his division along the road leading north to Lakenvley so as to occupy the Boers in the centre until French had swung round. On the right flank Buller was to turn off to the east and meet French on the railway behind the Boer centre. This plan had not so much chance of success as the wider turning movements originally planned for Buller and French, since its execution would be so much more patent to the Boers, but if properly carried out might yet result in the capture of Boer guns.

Roberts orders French on to his left flank, also Pole-Carew. Buller to turn east.

Aug. 26. Progress of French and Pole-Carew on the left flank.

On the 26th French with his cavalry was at Belfast Station by eight o'clock. Thence following the railway westwards until he was level with the Steelpoort valley he sent the Inniskilling Dragoons up it to threaten the Lydenburg road, and with the remainder of his three brigades attacked Suikerboschkop and Lang Kloof, two spurs of the Steenkampsberg, where the Lydenburg commando were posted with three guns. With

surprisingly few casualties, considering the strength of the Boer positions, he had cleared the hills by nightfall, and had reached a point slightly west of Lakenvley on the main Dullstroom road. On the same day Pole-Carew, leaving the 18th Brigade at Monument Hill, where they were exposed to heavy fire from the front, marched north with the Guards and 4th M.I. He was thus obliged to execute a flank march along the front of the Johannesburg and Middelburg positions at the edge of the Dalmanutha plateau, and was consequently exposed to gun and rifle fire nearly all the way without being able to do much damage in return. However, he reached a point nearly level with French and was able to assist him in clearing the Boers off Lang Kloof by directing some gun fire in that direction.*

Buller on the right flank reaches Vogelstruispoort.

Buller on the same day left Geluk. His orders being to place himself behind the Boers at Dalmanutha, he started off due north towards the railway with the intention of turning east after about five miles and attacking the Boers at Waaikraal, half-way between Geluk and Dalmanutha. But the Heidelberg and Bethal commandos still hung on to his right flank and rear. As soon as he left Geluk the Bethal men occupied the ridge north of it, which he had been holding for the last three days; and Howard's brigade, left as rearguard, became so hotly engaged with them that they were unable to withdraw with safety and rejoin the main body until the evening. The Boers were equally pertinacious on the right flank of the main column as it advanced to Vogelstruispoort Farm, where the turn east was to be made. Here the ridge north-east of the farm was cleared by the 19th Hussars and then occupied by Walter Kitchener's brigade, who, extending to a line four miles long, held it all day, with Brocklehurst's cavalry on the left and Dundonald on the right. Buller was now facing east, and he found the Boers in a strong position opposite to him at Waaikraal with guns and a Long Tom. The two 5-inch and two 4·7-inch guns were unable to silence the Long Tom, but the howitzers of the 61st Battery succeeded in dropping their shells into the Boer trenches. Then the infantry supported by the guns

* Pole-Carew's casualties on this day amounted to 55.

advanced, in some cases to within 400 yards of the Boers, gradually driving them back towards Dalmanutha.*

Buller determines not to turn east but to attack Bergendal to the north.

Meanwhile, during the day, the 19th Hussars had been exploring further to the north towards the railway, and in the evening they came back to Buller with the surprising information that the extreme right of the Boer line was at Bergendal, immediately south of the railway. Buller at once decided to give up the movement east, which he had originally arranged with the Commander-in-Chief, and proceeding still further north, to attack Bergendal instead of the Boers directly between him and Dalmanutha. From a point on the ridge above Vogelstruispoort Farm, where the fighting against the Bethal and Heidelberg men had taken place on the previous day, Buller on the morning of the 27th had a good view of what was really the Boer centre. Across an undulating valley, about two miles to the north of where he stood, and just south of the railway lay Bergendal Farm, well defined by a sparse line of trees on the bare Dalmanutha plateau. Immediately in front of the trees the plateau rose slightly to a natural platform two hundred yards from east to west, and a hundred from north to south, then fell abruptly into the valley. This platform, well defined on its western extremity by a stony outcrop and further strengthened by artificial means, was the outpost occupied by seventy-four of the Johannesburg mounted police under Oosthuizen. Behind them in the farm buildings and cattle kraals were a hundred more of the foot police. To their left rear was a small band of foreigners of Krieger's corps and Gravett's Germiston commando, numbering 400 all told. North of the railway line, but out of sight of Buller and of their own comrades in the police, the Krugersdorp men were in a position favourable for retreat but commanding hardly any field of fire. Kemp, however, had placed a party of forty foreigners attached to his commando under Baron Goldegg on a more westerly spur of the plateau, which had an effective range and even overlapped Oosthuizen's position. The police had a pom-pom and a maxim, the others had a few guns among them, and the two Long Toms south of the railway

Aug. 27. He surveys the Boer position.

* Buller's casualties were 8 killed, 34 wounded, 3 missing.

had the range of Buller's ridge. The Bethal and Heidelberg commandos had retired towards Dalmanutha the night before, leaving only a few men to trouble Buller's flank and rear, while the other commandos north of the line were busily employed by French and Pole-Carew. Thus the adversaries left in front of Buller numbered under a thousand.

Buller's disposition and plan of attack.

Against this part of Louis Botha's line Buller could bring some 8,000 men, besides thirty-eight guns, while Pole-Carew's two 4·7-inch guns on Monument Hill were not too far off to assist him. For his artillery Buller had an admirable position. The Vogelstruispoort ridge projected itself north of the farm to within about a mile and a quarter from Bergendal. On this part of the ridge Buller placed two field batteries, the 21st on the northern edge nearest Bergendal, and the 42nd at the southern edge, and all his heavy guns in the intervening space.* These guns commanded not only the farm, but also the Germiston position and the Long Toms to the east. From the point where the 21st Battery was posted the ridge curved with two breaks round in a north-westerly direction towards the railway, and so formed a rough semicircle with Bergendal as its centre. Early on the 27th Buller sent Brocklehurst, the divisional M.I. and the Chestnut Troop to occupy the portion of the ridge nearest the railway, distant about 3,000 yards due west of the police, and subsequently sent the 53rd Battery to take post on the right of the horse artillery. Howard's brigade and Dundonald's cavalry were left on Vogelstruispoort Farm to guard the baggage and the right rear of the column from any renewed attack by the Bethal and Heidelberg commandos, and the Manchesters lined that part of the ridge where the heavy guns were placed. The rest of the infantry were to take the Bergendal position by assault under cover of the artillery fire. The honours of this assault were assigned to the 2nd Rifle Brigade and the 1st Inniskilling Fusiliers, who were posted in readiness near the gaps on the right of the 53rd Battery and on the left

* The order of the guns from north to south on this part of the ridge was: 21st Battery, two naval 12-pdrs., 61st (howitzer) Battery, two more naval 12-pdrs., two 5-inch guns, two 4·7-inch naval guns, and the 42nd Battery.

of the 21st Battery respectively. The Inniskillings, attached to Walter Kitchener's brigade for this occasion, had, since their heavy losses at Hart's Hill, been made up to strength by large drafts from their linked militia battalion and by recruits, and had been painfully learning anew the business of war on lines of communication under their new colonel, Lloyd Payne. The battalion was therefore picked out by Buller, to give it a chance of proving its mettle. The two remaining battalions of Kitchener's brigade, the Devons and the Gordons, were in support on the ridge between the 53rd Battery and the 21st.

The battle opens with a tremendous artillery fire on Bergendal.

Shortly before 11 A.M. the bombardment began. The fire of Buller's thirty-eight guns was directed chiefly on Bergendal Farm. The trees on the farm, which for some sentimental reason the commandant had refused to cut down, afforded an excellent ranging target, and after a few shots the gunners were placing their shells with unerring accuracy on the police intrenchments. The shelling continued for three hours without intermission, no such severe and concentrated fire having been witnessed during the war since the days of Vaal Krantz and Pieter's Hill. The top and all sides of the platform were swept by a hail of shrapnel, while the rocks themselves were torn and rent by the explosion of the lyddite shells. Smoke and sulphurous gases and rocks shooting up into the air made the place look like a Vesuvius in eruption. But the police lay close behind the rocks, a few peering out now and then to watch for the infantry advance, which would give the signal for lining the schantzes; for, in spite of the accuracy of the fire, the trenches were so good that its material results were almost nothing. On the other hand the moral effect of the bombardment was immense. "We dared not leave the post," said a prisoner after the fight; "we dared not —it was certain death." Nor could the neighbouring commandos venture to approach the circle of fire to bring aid to their comrades against the infantry attack which was sure to follow. Botha, indeed, is said to have ordered the Krugersdorpers to reinforce the police, but no attention was paid to any such order, nor would the attempt to carry it out have been other than fruitless. For Botha and Viljoen, who was

in command of the centre, had, as already noticed, made no connecting trenches like those in the Colenso position, an omission for which they were now to pay heavily. Moreover the Boer guns, though numerically weaker, failed to do as much as they might to silence those of the English. Wolmarans, the commander of the artillery, was away to the north of the line opposite French; his best lieutenant, Von Dalwig, had been put out of action four days before; and, to crown all, by some mistake of the Netherlands Railway officials two truck-loads of gun ammunition had been returned to Machadodorp, so that the supply was short. In fact, one or two shots from the Long Toms and a few more from some of the Krupp guns in the Krugersdorp and Germiston positions were all the signs of life given by the Boer gunners.

Silence of the Boer gunners.

Consequently these seventy-four police were left to their fate, almost unsupported, in face of the whole of Buller's artillery and an infantry brigade.

When the attack had been thoroughly prepared by the guns, the Rifles and the Inniskillings were sent off to carry the position. Kitchener directed the Rifles to start down the slope from which the horse artillery and 53rd Battery were firing, and to march due east along the railway; the Inniskillings, issuing from the gap further to the south-east, were to converge on the left flank of the police at the same time as the Rifles arrived on their front. Lord Roberts himself had ridden over from Belfast and joined Generals Buller and Lyttelton in watching the attack from the ridge.

The Rifle Brigade and Inniskillings sent to take the position by assault.

The ground intervening between the ridge and the farm was somewhat broken, but in general sloped gradually up towards Bergendal, so that the police, though exposed to artillery fire from the ridge, had a magnificent field of fire against infantry advancing over the intervening space. The Inniskillings advanced in half companies at extended intervals with the companies échelonned from the left. Captain Ricardo's company led until they came to some rocks about half-way from their goal. Here the battalion halted to take cover from the fire of the Bergendal pom-pom and the long-range rifle fire of Krieger's men, and were joined by their

The infantry attack.

Maxim under Captain Jeffcoat. The Rifles, on leaving the ridge, had two companies in front extended at ten paces' interval, each company holding back half its strength in support; two companies followed in rear, while the remaining four were kept in reserve; very soon afterwards a third company was sent to prolong the right of the front line. The ground over which they had to go was less sheltered than that of the Inniskillings, and for fully 1,500 yards was under the direct frontal fire of their adversaries. On reaching an outcrop of rocks some 1,200 yards from the enemy's position a bare open slope appeared falling gradually down towards the plateau. The battalion sprang forward, but had barely gone 400 yards when a furious fire broke out from in front. The Riflemen threw themselves on the ground and replied; their Maxim and that of the Gordons, which Corporal Macdonald had gallantly brought up in support, proving at this moment of great service. Simultaneously a galling fire broke out against the left of the Rifle Brigade from Goldegg's men, whose presence in front of the Krugersdorpers had hitherto been concealed from the English, owing to the care with which they had reserved their fire till the right moment, and to the absence of proper scouting by Brocklehurst's cavalry. Some of Buller's guns were immediately turned on them, and a company of the Rifles was drawn from the reserve to answer their fire. Another reserve company was sent off to the right towards the rocks which the Inniskillings were just then approaching. The fire grew hotter and the gunners redoubled their efforts, recognizing that the critical moment had arrived; the noise was deafening, and a storm of bullets rained down upon the Riflemen. Then Colonel Metcalfe, in command of the Rifles, brought his last companies into the firing-line, which now had six companies abreast, and led his men gallantly forward. A strong wind was blowing in the men's faces, rendering difficult the passing of orders, but few orders are needed for a well-trained battalion at such a moment, and the Riflemen swept onward towards the position regardless of their losses. Two captains, Lysley and Steward, and the adjutant, Maitland, fell; three other officers and seventy-five riflemen, dropping in their tracks, testified to the

steadiness and marksmanship of the hard-fighting Zarps,* and Metcalfe himself fell severely wounded within five hundred yards of the position.

The Rifles and Inniskillings enter the Zarps' position.

Meanwhile Kitchener, fearing that the combination of the two battalions might be missed, sent his staff-officer, Captain Spry, to order the Inniskillings forward from the rocks. Staggered for a moment by the pom-pom fire, which most of them had never experienced before, they soon rallied, charged down the slope in front of them and then, after fixing bayonets, up the last ascent. Until the last moment the guns kept up their fire; one gun which could not see the target being stopped by Buller's timely order just at the right moment. The Zarps went on coolly firing till within the last five minutes, then, as the bayonets gleamed close to them, most of the survivors rushed to their horses in the kraal and galloped away. A remnant, however, remained to meet the infantry attacks. The Inniskillings were first in the position, the Rifles, well led for the last 500 yards by Colonel Cockburn, their second-in-command, arrived a minute or two later; here they found and took prisoner the brave commandant, Philip Oosthuizen, who was severely wounded. Lieutenant Pohlman was killed, and some forty others of the seventy-four were killed, wounded or captured, some of them being among the fugitives against whom the infantry and the guns had re-opened fire. The pom-pom was also captured; the maxim had already been blown to atoms by a shell.

This success decides the battle.

The battle was now won. On the north of the railway the Lydenburg, Middelburg and Johannesburg commandos had at first been holding their own against French and Pole-Carew, who took no serious part in the day's proceedings. French had fought his way up to Lakenvley, where his division was halted by Lord Roberts's orders. In this position he was doing no good and was moreover blocking the way to Pole-Carew with the Guards and Henry's M.I., who were thus still kept in their uncomfortable and unprofitable position of the preceding day, strung up along the road to Dullstroom with their flank exposed to the Boer

* It will be remembered that this was the common abbreviation for the *Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek's Politie.*

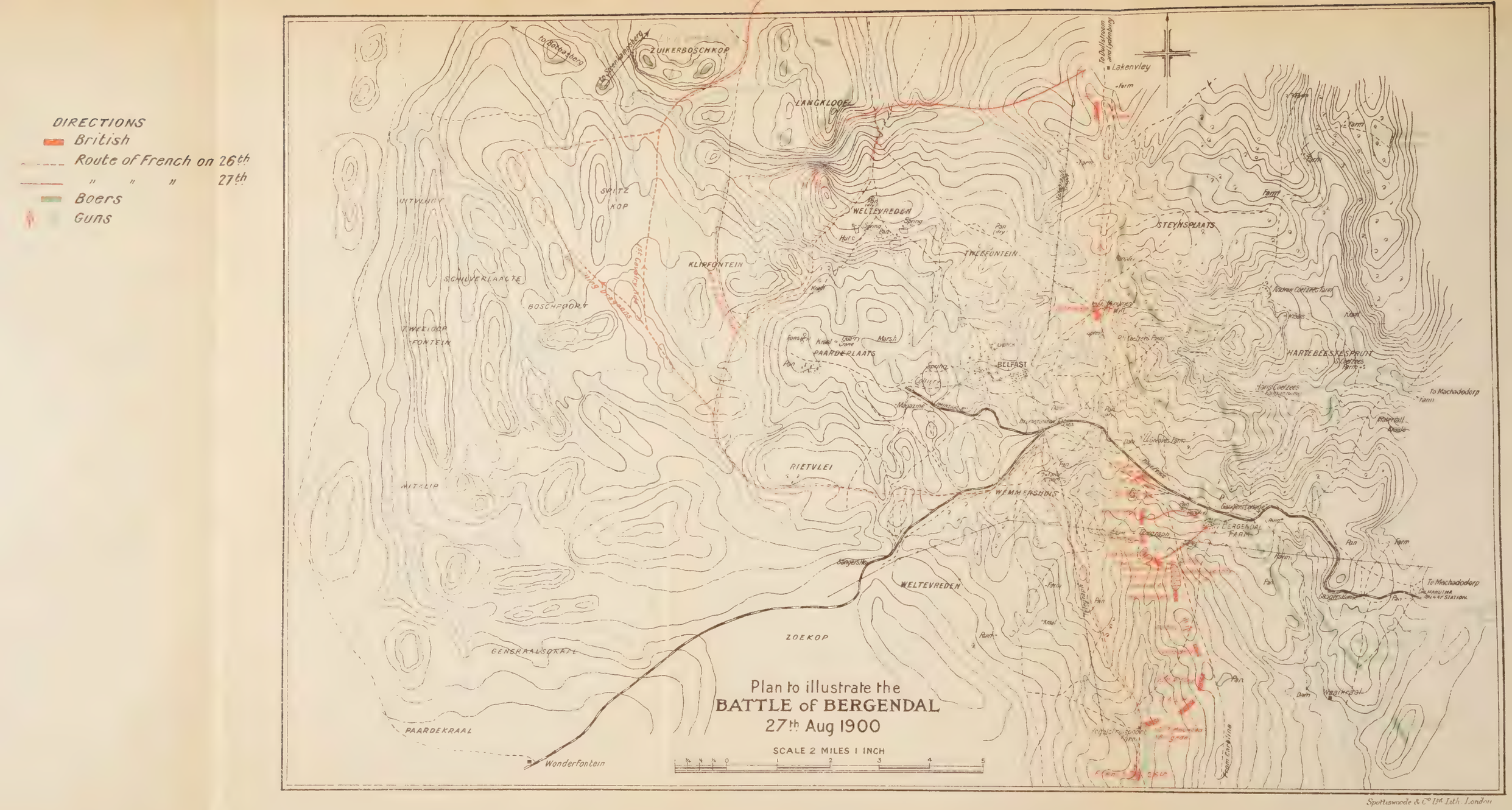
front.* As soon, however, as the word was passed along the Boer lines that the police were in flight, they all began hurriedly leaving their intrenchments, those north of the railway streaming off towards Machadodorp and Helvetia, while the Carolina, Heidelberg and Bethal commandos south of the line retreated to the Kaapsche Hoop mountains. The only pursuit that was attempted was by Buller. Brocklehurst's cavalry, which had been almost useless on his left flank, now changed over to the right and pursued the Germiston men along the Dalmanutha road. The rest of Kitchener's infantry swarmed over to Bergendal Farm, followed by some of the guns, and hastened the retreat of the police and of Goldegg's men, whom they enfiladed as they passed through the main Krugersdorp position. Nowhere, however, was the pursuit pressed very hard, and the great majority of the Boers had got clear away by nightfall.†

Aug. 28–30. In spite of warning as to Boer intentions Roberts loses touch with Botha's army.

A month previous to this Lord Roberts had received from Consul Crowe's intelligence at Delagoa Bay a forecast of the Boer plans in the event of their defeat on the Belfast position, which went to show that the Transvaal government would retire to Nelspruit, that the women and children would be sent to Barberton, and that Botha's main force would retire north to defend the roads to Lydenburg. In all essential particulars this information proved to be absolutely correct. The old President with his ministers and officials went by train to Nelspruit, and Botha, leaving the Krugersdorp and Johannesburg commandos under Viljoen to defend the railway, took most of the commandos that had been north of the line from their rallying-point at Helvetia towards Lydenburg, while Fourie and Smuts, with the commandos south of the line, stayed to defend the difficult mountain approaches to Barberton. But Lord Roberts's own intelligence entirely lost touch

* One result of this awkward position of French and Pole-Carew was that all French's baggage, which had been sent to him up the Dullstroom road, was blocked by Pole-Carew's column.

† The Rifle Brigade lost at Bergendal Captain Lysley, Captain Campbell and Captain Steward, and 10 rank and file killed; 5 officers, including the colonel, and 63 rank and file wounded. The casualties in the rest of Buller's army, including 17 of the Inniskillings, were 31 wounded. French and Pole-Carew had no casualties on the 27th August.



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with the Boers on the evening of the 27th, and on the 28th Lord Roberts directed the pursuit as if all the Boers intended to remain on the railway. Hutton was brought up to Belfast from Middelburg; Hamilton's column, now released from the Western Transvaal, was also coming up there by degrees. These additional defenders for Belfast made it unnecessary to keep French and Pole-Carew any longer in the neighbourhood. French therefore was ordered to advance along the road east of Lakenvley towards the railway, and Pole-Carew to follow in his support. French, leaving Dickson on Zwartkopjes to contain some of the Lydenburg men who were still holding the approaches to Lydenburg from the south-west, reached Elandsfontein hill, fifteen miles north of Dalmanutha, that evening. This position was of considerable strength, and had been most carefully intrenched; but the few Boers left there made no attempt to hold it. On the same day Buller marched to Machadodorp, Dundonald, in advance, having several encounters with Boer detachments scattered on the hills on each side of the town.

On the 29th a Boer detachment which had stopped Dundonald between Machadodorp and Helvetia had disappeared, and Buller occupied Helvetia in the morning, being joined there by French* about noon. In the afternoon Pole-Carew came up with the Guards, and French turned south towards the railway at Waterval Onder.

Aug. 30. Release of English prisoners at Nooitgedacht.

On the 30th French occupied Waterval Boven and Waterval Onder, which were afterwards taken over by Pole-Carew. Buller, leaving Lyttelton with half the Natal column at Helvetia, went on with Dundonald, three battalions and a few guns to the heights above Nooitgedacht further along the railway. Thence he could see a crowd of unarmed men straggling up the railway valley towards Pole-Carew. These proved to be the 2,000 prisoners who had been confined at Nooitgedacht, among whom were men captured in an early stage of the war and removed from the Pretoria prison in June, while others were more recent arrivals. They had been so badly housed and so badly fed at Nooitgedacht, that Viljoen himself was ashamed of the treatment they

* Dickson had rejoined French that morning.

had received from his government. This general on his arrival at Nooitgedacht, where he found the 2,000 prisoners under a guard of fifteen Boers, asked the President what he should do with them. He was told to release them, which he did after a few genial words of greeting. A few of the officers, however, were removed to Barberton.

All pursuing columns collected on the railway.

Thus by the end of August the three principal columns of Roberts's army were gathered together on the railway, while the majority of the Boers had gone off out of their reach on each side. Lord Roberts on the 31st realized the disadvantage of this arrangement, and made a fresh disposition of his troops more suited to the tactics adopted by the Boers. But he undoubtedly thought that the battle of Bergendal had decided the struggle, and on the 1st September proclaimed the annexation of the Transvaal to the Queen's dominions.

Sept. 1. Transvaal annexed.

Criticism of the operations ending in the battle of Bergendal.

Although the operations which culminated in the battle of Bergendal have had a special lustre thrown upon them by the gallantry of the infantry attack on the 27th August, and the even more gallant defence made by the Johannesburg police, they cannot rank among the more successful efforts either of Lord Roberts or of General Botha. On the English side the mistake of abandoning at Buller's instance the original plan for a wide turning movement sacrificed all chance of a crushing defeat of the Boers.* Lord Roberts himself did not arrive till the operations had been well begun, and even then, though his scheme contemplated his favourite tactics of enveloping flanks and might have resulted in some captures, he allowed Buller to go out of his course against the centre, and himself kept French back at Lakenvley till the Boers had already retreated. Thus the culminating battle of Bergendal was reduced simply to a duel of Buller's artillery and a couple of his battalions against seventy-four men. The rest of Buller's troops, including the whole of his cavalry, and all Roberts's own troops, did little more than guard the front and flanks, instead of joining actively in the attack. In

* That such a turning movement would have been difficult is undeniable, but Hutton's and French's subsequent advances to Kaapsche Hoop and Barberton show that it would have been possible, if at the same time the attention of the Boers on the railway had been diverted. See pp. 469–473.

the actual fighting Buller's artillery showed the excellent training they had received in the long and bitter fighting on the Tugela, by the accuracy of their shooting and the nicety with which they kept up their fire to the very last moment in support of the infantry. But the chief honours belong to the 2nd Rifle Brigade. Theirs was a gallant charge, carried through by officers and men in a manner worthy of the traditions of this famous corps, over an open rifle-swept plain with hardly a check, and with as much order and recollection of precept as are possible for any troops who are being shot at in front and on the flank by a well-posted adversary. Undoubtedly Buller, by the personal enthusiasm which he aroused in his men, fostered this willing gallantry in them, and this is a quality with which no general can dispense. But battles are not a mere school of gallantry. Looked at from any other point of view, Bergendal was a mistake, and the mistake was aggravated on the succeeding days by the failure to follow up the Boers along their main lines of retreat.

Excellent work done by Buller's artillery and by the Rifle Brigade.

On the Boer side Botha was obviously at fault, after choosing the strong position he did, in not securing it by connecting the various parts of the defence, or providing for the mutual co-operation of the commandos. This arose from the want, almost invariably found in the Boer armies, of systematic organization. Consequently each commando fought an isolated battle of its own, whereas if, for example, the Heidelberg, Bethal, Carolina, and Germiston men had taken a vigorous part in the last day's battle, they might well have threatened Buller's rear so seriously as to make him desist from the attack on the centre. But they did nothing. The police fought magnificently. Probably no other men in the Boer army could have stood the fire which they bore so well, not because there were not individuals among them equally courageous, but simply because it requires corporate discipline to remain so steady and to aim straight in such terrifying circumstances. This the Zarps had, the other Boers had not as yet. But once the battle was lost, Botha, as so often was the case, recovered a good deal of the advantage by his excellent arrangements for retreat.

Botha's error was in not keeping up the connection between his commandos.

Gallantry of the Zarps.

II

Aug. 31. Roberts sees his mistake and re-arranges his columns.

In the field Lord Roberts had the great merit of being as prompt to see his own errors as the enemy's, and the capacity of rapidly altering his plans in the light of fresh knowledge. On this occasion he quickly saw that he was allowing the Boers to slip away from him; accordingly, on August 31, he made a change in the disposition of his troops. Instead of keeping Buller, French and Pole-Carew all together on the railway, he ordered Buller up towards Lydenburg in the north, and French towards Barberton in the south, leaving only Pole-Carew on the railway; thus opening out his troops fanwise, so as to enclose the Boers.

Sept. 1. Buller starts north from Helvetia. Difficult country before him.

The two portions of Buller's column were concentrated on the Machadodorp-Lydenburg road and marched north on September 1st. This road ascends steadily for ten miles from Helvetia, climbing successive ridges and skirting mountain plateaux, until it reaches its highest point at Schoeman's Nek, where, for the first time, the wild and splendid scenery of the Crocodile River bursts into view in a magnificent panorama, presenting on all sides an apparently impenetrable barrier of mountains, which rise sheer from the river banks and are intersected in every direction by rocky and precipitous kloofs. It is indeed a region of great difficulty for movement. The roads are few in number, for the most part mere rocky tracks of a nature that defy description, while throughout the whole mountain area but few supplies can be found to meet the wants of a field army and reduce the strain on its convoys. It was into this labyrinth that Botha had been permitted to penetrate with a strong force and part of his artillery; and time enough had been given him to complete his preparations for defence.

Buller chooses the road to Lydenburg by Badfontein, which Botha had previously taken.

Two roads led to Lydenburg from the area now in possession of Lord Roberts's forces, one from Belfast by Dullstroom, and the other by Badfontein; the latter, which is a good road, after descending into the valley, crosses the Crocodile by a new iron bridge. Buller, who was following up Botha's tracks by

the Badfontein road, had proposed that a second column should be despatched on the parallel road by Dulstroom, in order that the two columns might co-operate with one another in the manner continually required by the conditions of mountain warfare; and Roberts had agreed that if Buller found it necessary as he went on a second column should be sent under Ian Hamilton. On the night of the 1st September touch with Botha had not been regained, and Buller had reached Badfontein on the further side of the river, after leaving a strong post at Schoeman's Nek commanding the Crocodile valley from the south. As all available information tended to show that the Boers were not in great strength on the Lydenburg road, a forward movement was ordered for the morning of September 2. But hardly had Dundonald's brigade trotted forward to take their place in the van, than they received ample evidence that they were not only in presence of the enemy, but also in front of an extremely formidable position.

Sept. 2. He is held up by the Boers at Rietfontein, and asks for help.

The semicircle of mountains at Rietfontein, which closes the valley running up from Badfontein, completely dominates the road and all possible avenues of approach from the south; and Louis Botha had recognized its advantages as a defensive position. But as the British troops came within sight the Boers made the very unusual mistake of disclosing their strength and position before the column had approached within effective range, by opening fire on the leading horsemen with their guns and pom-poms. The advanced pickets of the enemy stood on a slight eminence to the east of the road. Against this point the Chestnut Troop came into action. Under cover of their fire two squadrons of the South African Light Horse rushed the position, where they were joined by the 4th Division Mounted Infantry, while Strathcona's Horse closed up under shelter of the rise. Although very heavily shelled, the mounted troops found good cover behind some old walls, and maintained their position throughout the day. Neither the infantry nor the remainder of the guns of the column had advanced sufficiently far to be seriously affected by the fire, as they were kept concealed in the folds of the ground.

That evening Buller, considering that a direct attack on the position would be too costly, reported the situation to Lord Roberts and withdrew his men into bivouac at 6 P.M.

Sept. 3–4. Ian Hamilton going by the other road *viâ* Dullstroom gets into communication with Buller.

Lord Roberts immediately ordered Ian Hamilton to take all the troops of his column which had reached Belfast * and start off along the Dullstroom road, so as to take Botha in flank. As he had no mounted troops, Buller was ordered to send round Brocklehurst's cavalry to join him. Ian Hamilton left Belfast early on September 3, pushed through an obstinate Boer rearguard which was holding the road with two heavy guns, and by the evening of the 4th was in communication with Buller at a point fifteen miles to the south-west of him.

Sept. 3–4. Buller does nothing.

Sept. 5. Repulses an attack.

Buller during these two days had done nothing. On the 5th Botha opened fire on the camps of the 7th Brigade and artillery with a Long Tom some 10,000 yards to the eastward; the troops were slightly withdrawn and the 5-inch guns replied. Then, as the Boers were seen to be working at sangars on a hill to the right nearer the camp, Buller decided to send a force to seize this hill, choosing Howard's brigade for a duty which might with advantage have been executed earlier. Covered by the howitzers and field guns, the infantry seized the hill, whereupon the Boers opened a sharp rifle fire upon them at 2,000 yards' range, which only ceased at dusk. Aided by infantry working parties, the 53rd Battery dragged their guns up the steep ascent, and Howard, making good his hold on the hill, was undisturbed during the night.

During that night Ian Hamilton, who had steadily continued his advance up the steep gradients and across the difficult drifts of the western road, sent forward the Royal Scots eight miles ahead of his column to occupy Zwaggershoek, a ridge on the north-west flank of the Rietfontein position, a task which they accomplished without much difficulty.

Sept. 6. Ian Hamilton relieves Buller by taking the Boers opposing him in rear.

On the morning of the 6th Brocklehurst's cavalry led Hamilton's advance through the long and difficult defile between Zwaggershoek and the hill which commands Riet-

* Smith-Dorrien's brigade, now made up of 1st Royal Scots, 1st Royal Irish Regiment and 1st Gordons, with the C.I.V.M.I., the 20th Battery and two 5-inch guns.

fontein from the north, carefully picketing the hills to the left until the rest of the infantry came up, while the Royal Scots took similar precautions on the right. The enemy kept up a brisk sniping fire from the north throughout the day, but, thanks to the precautions taken, only a few casualties occurred. On the pass being cleared it was found that Hamilton's march had compelled the Boers to abandon their positions in front of Buller, who had been making careful reconnaissances for a joint attack from the front. At 11.30 A.M., on hearing of Hamilton's success, he sent forward Dundonald, who joined hands with Brocklehurst, and the two pressed on into Lydenburg, Captain Chetwode with a squadron of the 19th Hussars being the first to enter. No resistance was offered by the inhabitants, but hardly were the cavalry inside the town than the Boers, who had retreated to the Paardeplaats mountain east of and overlooking Lydenburg, opened fire with their long-range guns. So leaving a few men in the town, Brocklehurst withdrew out of range for the night, while Dundonald bivouacked at a neighbouring farm. In rear of their mounted troops the two columns halted a few miles beyond Rietfontein. The following day Buller and Hamilton closed in on Lydenburg, but found themselves still a mark for Botha's Long Toms on Paardeplaats, which commanded Lydenburg itself and the camping grounds outside.

Lydenburg captured by Brocklehurst and Dundonald.

On the railway Pole-Carew, with the Guards and Henry's M.I., had remained at Waterval Onder during this first week of September, the 18th Brigade being at Helvetia. On September the 1st Lord Roberts had ordered an immediate advance eastwards, but Pole-Carew thought that, unless the strong positions held by the Boers on the heights lining each side of the railway ravine could be turned, such an operation would be unnecessarily risky. On September 3 Colonel Pilkington, with the West Australian M.I., had found the Carolina men too strong to be dislodged from the hills immediately south of the station; there were other Boers on the north, and Viljoen with his main body was in an almost impregnable position at Godwaan River Station, fifteen miles further east. In order, therefore, to ease

Sept. 1–7. Pole-Carew at Waterval Onder.

Pole-Carew, Roberts determined to turn Viljoen's and the Carolina commando's flanks and to recall Ian Hamilton to the railway.

Hutton ordered to turn the Carolina commando out of hills south of Waterval Onder.

Hutton was ordered to withdraw 300 of the 1st M.I. Corps under Colonel Alderson from the posts he was holding between Middelburg and Belfast, and he was further reinforced by the 2nd Brabant's Horse belonging to Ian Hamilton's division and by Henry's M.I. and "J" Battery, detached for the purpose by Pole-Carew. With these mounted troops he was to march towards Kaapsche Hoop by the road running to the south of the railway. This move was intended to serve the double purpose of clearing the ground for Pole-Carew and of protecting French's left flank on his way to Barberton by the road still further south.

Aug. 31–Sept. 6. French concentrating at Carolina for his advance on Barberton.

After leaving Pole-Carew at Waterval Onder French concentrated his two cavalry brigades at Machadodorp on the 31st August, and on the 2nd September sent forward Gordon along the road to Carolina. On the 4th he himself started with Dickson's brigade, and occupied Carolina on the 6th. He had previously circulated reports that his objectives were Standerton and Ermelo, so that Smuts, who was between Carolina and the De Kaap mountains with the Standerton and Ermelo commandos, was taken by surprise and made no attempt to stop him. On the day that he occupied Carolina French received nine days' supplies from the railway and was reinforced by a baggage guard consisting of the Suffolks, the Shropshire Light Infantry and two guns of the 66th Battery, under Colonel Spens, and by Mahon with the I.L.H., some M.I. and "M" Battery. Mahon would have joined French sooner, but on the previous day he had retraced his steps to the railway to relieve a small post between Pan and Wonderfontein. This post was held by a small party of 105 Canadian Mounted Rifles under Major Saunders. Early on that morning Commandant Dirksen, who since the occupation of Middelburg had attached himself to Erasmus's commando north of the line, attacked the post with 300 men, two field guns, and a pom-pom. In the dark and mist of the early morning the Boers crept up unperceived, surprising and capturing an outlying

Sept. 5. Attack by Dirksen on Canadian post near Pan.

picket of six men and arriving within 100 yards of the post. Here the leading Boer was first challenged and then shot dead by the Canadian sentry over the machine-gun, and the defenders immediately stood to arms with all the coolness of veteran troops. Though heavily attacked for some hours, they beat off the enemy, losing Major Saunders, Lieutenant Moodie, and two men wounded, but inflicting a loss upon the Boers of two killed and six wounded. Mahon, who showed a true soldierly instinct in marching at once to the sound of the guns, arrived only to find that Dirksen had retreated into the Steelpoort valley.

Sept. 7. Position and plans of respective forces.

By the 7th, therefore, Lord Roberts's fan was opened wide in readiness for the further advance. French was at Carolina with 5,280 men, 3,514 horses and 20 guns, Hutton at Belfast with 1,600 mounted men and 8 guns, Pole-Carew at Waterval Onder and Helvetia with 7,500 men and 12 guns, and Buller and Ian Hamilton were at Lydenburg with 12,000 men and 48 guns. Opposing these columns Botha had about 2,000 men, two Long Toms and several field guns just east of Lydenburg, Viljoen had about 1,200 men, a Long Tom, and some field guns at Godwaan Station, with about 300 of the Carolina commando prolonging his line towards Waterval Onder, while Smuts and Fourie, with the remains of the Ermelo, Bethal and Standerton commandos, amounting to another 1,000, were between Carolina and Barberton. Barberton itself was held by 150 of the Swaziland commando under Opperman, and a great number of railway guards and others were taking their ease on the railway watching over the government and the stores accumulated there.

Roberts hopes to corner the Boer forces.

With these dispositions there seemed every hope that Lord Roberts would be able to pin down all the Boer forces remaining east of Belfast, as their escape to the rear was blocked by the Portuguese border.

Sept. 8. Buller attacks Paardeplaats.

On the 8th Sir Redvers Buller arranged for the attack upon Paardeplaats, from which the Boers commanded the main road to Spitzkop, a small mining station about thirty miles east of Lydenburg near the Sabi River. Hamilton's column was ordered to assail the Boer left, with Brocklehurst protecting his right flank, while to Lyttelton with the four remaining

battalions of his division fell the duty of attacking the Boer right, his left being covered by Dundonald. In the centre the whole of the artillery was to come into action in support. About 10 o'clock the infantry had arrived at their allotted positions, the field guns following them, while the 5-inch guns near the town and the 12-pounders and howitzers at the foot of the mountain began an accurate and very searching fire upon the whole of the high ground. Indeed the excellent support given by the artillery to the infantry attack was as noticeable here as at Bergendal. By noon the Long Toms withdrew, but not before they had given a last reminder of their range and power. As the 2nd Gordons* were moving to a flank in column a shrapnel fired at 10,000 yards' range burst low, in line with the Volunteer company, one man being killed and twenty wounded by this single shell. The Volunteers, nevertheless, continued their advance with perfect steadiness. Lyttelton's attack, on Buller's left, was led by the Devonshire Regiment, followed by the remaining battalions, while on the extreme left two squadrons of the South African Light Horse worked well and contributed materially to the success of the day. Hamilton's infantry, under Smith-Dorrien, with the Royal Scots leading on the right and the Royal Irish in the centre, advanced in widely-extended lines, covering the ground with great rapidity, and after six hours' stiff climbing reached the crest at 3.30 P.M., while at almost the same moment Lyttelton's men on the left also gained the summit. Beyond the mountain ridge the road dips down to a narrow nek which connects with a high plateau to the eastward, and on each side of this natural causeway the ground falls abruptly. Along this causeway the whole of the guns and transport and the greater part of the Boer riflemen had to pass, and under normal circumstances a defeat might well have become a disaster. But, as usual, the valour and skill of the Boer rearguard enabled the main body to retire without serious loss. Sending away his guns betimes, Botha left a few resolute men to oppose the advancing infantry to

But fails to catch the Boer convoy.

* Two battalions of the Gordons were engaged in this attack, the 1st in Smith-Dorrien's brigade and the 2nd in Walter Kitchener's.

the last, and then rapidly withdrew them. The Boers were materially aided upon this occasion by a thick mist which had begun to settle in patches upon the highest peaks early in the afternoon, and at the moment of the assault covered the whole mountain side with its friendly veil, rendering the British guns useless when they were dragged up to the summit.*

Botha returns to the railway.

That evening Botha retired through Spitzkop with most of his men and guns by the southern road which was still open to Nelspruit on the railway, leaving Gravett with a comparatively small force to delay Buller and keep some of the tracks to the north-west open. At this point Lord Roberts recalled Ian Hamilton to the railway, leaving Buller, already weakened by the employment of some of his troops in guarding his communications with the railway, to watch the approaches from the bushveld to Lydenburg and the high veld beyond. But, though thus reduced in numbers, and deprived of the services of two such enterprising and skilful leaders as Hamilton and Smith-Dorrien, the Natal Army continued for three days more to harass and pursue the enemy. On September 9 it was found that the Boers were holding some rocky ridges in front of the Mauchberg, five miles to the south-east of Paardeplaats, and the 5-inch guns were brought up to prepare the way for the infantry. Under cover of their shells the 1st King's Royal Rifles and 2nd Gordons, advancing to the attack under a fire of guns and pom-poms, drove the defenders from the mountain with a fine rush. As the 60th reached the top of the mountain, which rises to a height of 8,000 feet above the sea, and commands a magnificent view over the road which winds down past the Devil's Knuckles into the valley towards Spitzkop, the South African Light Horse and Strathcona's men were sent after them, and raced for the summit. An outburst of excited cheering brought up Sir Redvers Buller, who saw, almost at his feet, the whole of the Boer convoy within artillery range and making desperate efforts to escape. A word from Sir Redvers, and the South African Light

Roberts recalls Ian Hamilton to the railway.

Sept. 9–10. The Boer convoy again has a narrow escape from capture by Buller.

* Buller's and Ian Hamilton's casualties on this day together amounted to only 26.

Horse galloped down the hill in pursuit, while the hoisting of two white flags by the Boer convoy seemed for a moment to show that the prize was won. But in place of what appeared from the top to be an easy road, the Light Horse found a steep and winding track, while a series of steep ridges still lay between them and their expected prey. There were Boer guns and pom-poms behind the Devil's Knuckles, while the intervening ridges were held by a stout rearguard, who thoroughly grasped the situation. The moment that the irregulars threw themselves from their tired horses and advanced towards the ridges, a furious fire was opened upon them. The Boer rearguard refused to give way an inch, and, by their bold attitude, allowed their wagons the necessary respite. The white flags were hauled down again, and the convoy slowly drew away to the shelter of the Knuckles, the rearguard holding its position till dark. It was most unfortunate that at the critical moment the 5-inch guns, which alone, among Buller's remaining artillery, possessed sufficient range to reach the Boers, had been held back in rear, for the Chestnut Troop, which came within 5,600 yards, was unable effectively to check the retreat. Next morning, by dawn, the 5-inch and 12-pounder guns were in position on the nek, but the moment had passed. The rear of the convoy was now 9,600 yards distant, and the steep descents and bends of the Spitzkop road gave them much cover. The guns opened, however, and were at once answered by a Long Tom on the Spitzkop road, which continued to fire until 2 P.M. Strathcona's Horse, with the 53rd Battery, supported by the Highlanders and Rifles, went down in pursuit and came near to taking the Long Tom, which was removed, only just in time, after several of the gun detachment had been hit.

Sept. 11. Buller occupies roads leading from Spitzkop to Lydenburg.

On the 10th and 11th Buller occupied, with guns and infantry posts, all the dominating points of the valley leading to Spitzkop, completely commanding all the approaches to Lydenburg from the east, while Dundonald's horsemen descended into the Sabi valley, where they found several farms strongly held, and discovered at the Glynn Lydenburg mine an immense quantity of supplies, which they captured.

Some 300 boxes of small-arm ammunition were also found and destroyed.

Description of French's road between Carolina and Barberton.

If French had not so enterprising an enemy in front of him as Buller, the country he had to traverse was at least as difficult. Barberton, his goal, lies in a basin of mountains of which the precipitous and inhospitable nature is well indicated by the names they bear locally. Just as the range where Buller was operating had its Devil's Knuckles and Hell Gates, the De Kaap mountains round Barberton had their Devil's Kantoor and Devil's Knuckles also. Three roads lead over these mountains to Barberton: one from Godwaan on the railway past Kaapsche Hoop, the Natal road from the west over the Nelhoogte Pass, and the third by the Swaziland route from Bremersdorp on the south. Hutton was coming over the first, and of the others, which were both accessible from Carolina, the Swaziland route was reported to French as being so bad that he chose that over the Nelhoogte Pass. But none could well have been worse. The first ten miles from Carolina over rolling open veld are easy going, but after that the road climbs steeply on to the Roodehoogte ridge, a precipitous backbone of sandstone which divides the beds of the Zeekoespruit on the north and the Buffelspruit on the south. Descending thence to Buffelspruit drift, the road leads over comparatively easy country across the Komati River to the store of Hlomohlom at the foot of the Nelhoogte Pass, where the De Kaap mountains begin. This pass has a gradient over the last part of nearly thirty-five degrees, and is commanded by kopjes on each side. Beyond, a winding and difficult road, thirty-five miles in length, leads down the 3,000 feet dip to Barberton, or, as an alternative, a goat-track passing along the Devil's Knuckles shortens the distance by fifteen miles. Besides the difficulty of the road, there was a further one about supplies. When French was able to begin his march he had eight days' supplies left. The wagons necessary for so large a store were in themselves a difficulty, as together with the troops they extended over thirteen miles of road. And there was even a doubt whether these would prove sufficient. If the column received a serious check, its supplies might be reduced to a dangerously

low limit; for French had no chains of posts to bring convoys on to him. There was a possibility that Hutton might open a way for convoys from Godwaan, but this was by no means certain.

Sept. 9. French starts, having put Smuts off the scent.

When French started on the 9th September he had put the Boers so successfully off the scent that General Smuts, with most of the Ermelo and Standerton commandos, had gone off to the east of Lake Chrissie to follow up French's supposed route to Ermelo. Fourie, however, with about 500 men and three guns, had been left to hold the Roodehoogte Hills. For the first twelve miles over the open country there was no check. Then it became evident that the difficult road over the hills would be disputed. Gordon's cavalry was sent forward to turn the Boer left resting on the kloofs and ridges near the Buffelspruit, while a section of the 66th Battery and a squadron of cavalry took post on a hill facing them. These measures soon drove the Boers from their first position, but only to retire on a stronger one further east, which was well protected and had a good field of fire. Mahon's mounted infantry were unable to turn their right flank to the north, but a combined attack by Spens's infantry, supported by guns in the centre and by Gordon's cavalry, who kept making headway to the south, gradually drove the Boers off the ridge, and left clear the descent to the drift. Twenty-four miles' unimpeded march over comparatively open country brought French by the evening of the 11th to the base of the Kaapsche Hoop mountains across the Komati River drift, and on the 12th he attacked the pass.

Reaches Nelhoogte Pass by Sept. 11.

Sept. 12. Captures it.

As soon as news of French's real direction had reached the Boer headquarters on the 9th September, an urgent telegram had been sent to Smuts directing him to return and defend the mountain barrier to Barberton, and by the morning of the 12th he had taken up a position on the Nelhoogte Pass, lining the wooded ridges on each side of the precipitous road along which the column would have to come. The night before Hutton had been in communication with French from a position north of Hlomohlom, and it was hoped that he would be able seriously to threaten the Boer

flank by seizing Tafelkop to the north of the pass. But Hutton had found it impracticable, so that French was left to his own resources. French sent out Gordon with the Inniskilling Dragoons, Greys, Carabineers, and 14th Hussars, "T" Battery, and 100 New Zealand M.I. before daybreak to seize the ridges to the south, and a squadron of Mahon's to reconnoitre those on the north-west. By 7 o'clock Gordon had crowned a ridge commanding the southern side of the pass with the Inniskillings, who on the way had surprised a Boer commando at breakfast, while the 14th Hussars, further to the right, were making their way to the top of the pass itself. The track over ravines and rocks and steep cliffs was so bad that the horses had to be led for the greater part of it, but in spite of this, two guns and a pom-pom were drawn up by hand and shelled the Boer left flank. Meanwhile the infantry and a squadron of the Inniskillings, supported by a naval gun and the two field guns, were advancing up the main road, clearing the southern ridge as they went, while Mahon attacked the northern ridge. Before mid-day the pass was gained. A few minutes later the field guns, each having been drawn by sixteen horses for the last 800 yards, in which the road rises 500 feet, were firing at the Boers as they retreated towards Steynsdorp. The pursuit was pressed during the afternoon, and the I.L.H. captured seven wagons full of supplies. The difficulties, however, were not yet at an end, for the road was so steep that it required three days to bring the whole baggage train to the top of the pass. French, however, did not wait; leaving Dickson's and Mahon's brigades and the infantry to guard the wagons, he sent Gordon's guns, under escort of the Inniskillings, by the road to Barberton on the 13th, while he himself, with the rest of the 1st Cavalry Brigade, took the goat-track down the hills on the same day. It was a great risk; no supplies could be taken except on horseback, and no guns or wheeled vehicles of any kind; and for most of the way the whole brigade had to descend in single file, so that a few well-posted skirmishers would have had them all at their mercy. But French had gauged the state of mind of the Boers. Smuts had fled, while the guard left over Barberton, reckoning that French would not appear

Sept. 13. Goes on by a goat-track to Barberton.

there for another forty-eight hours, had not yet sent forward a man to oppose him.

Barberton surprised.

The surprise was complete. Major Scobell, of the Greys, with a small party of sixty men, pushing on boldly in advance of the rest, cut the railway north of the town and secured the Landdrost of Vryheid, who was driving away with £10,000 in gold and notes. Oppermann with the Swaziland commando escaped to the hills just in time to avoid capture, leaving 80 British prisoners, 2,500 Boer refugees, and vast stores of supplies in the town.* At the station forty-four engines and two trains were captured, and three days later French's advanced troops under Major Allenby made another seizure of fifty engines at Avoca Station. This rolling-stock proved of the utmost utility in subsequent operations of the campaign.

Sept. 8–13. Hutton's expedition to Kaapsche Hoop.

On the same day that French occupied Barberton, Hutton cleared away the last obstacle to Pole-Carew's advance along the railway by taking Kaapsche Hoop, thereby also opening another road to Barberton. Starting from Machadodorp on the 8th, he had found the Carolina commando, reinforced by some Irish-Americans under Lutter, strongly posted at Weltevreden on Pole-Carew's right flank. A vigorous attack by Henry's force, in which "J" Battery distinguished themselves by their dash and accurate shooting, soon drove back the Boer centre; flank attacks by Brabant's Horse and some Australian Mounted Rifles completed the rout. After this Hutton had no further difficulties beyond the nature of the ground; but these were great. On arriving at Uitkomst, eight miles west of Tafelkop, he found himself separated from the mountain range by the almost precipitous Godwaan valley. Keeping double teams for two guns and a pom-pom, he sent back the rest of his guns and his wagons to the railway, and, thus lightly equipped, plunged across the valley by the only feasible road

* The amount of stores collected in Barberton by the Boers may be gauged from the fact that although a supply column had been sent off by them on the 8th to Christiaan Botha's force at Piet Retief, French, besides feeding all the refugees and his own troops with unwonted abundance for a fortnight, was able to supply Pole-Carew and Ian Hamilton each with a week's supplies for 5,000 men as they came up the line.

to the mountains. Early on the 13th, after a night march, he seized Kaapsche Hoop, thus turning Viljoen's almost impregnable position, which was hastily evacuated on the news of Hutton's approach.

British columns thus closing in on the Boers all round.

Now at length it seemed that Botha's army could not escape. Most of the south-eastern commandos had, it is true, fled south before French's advance, but except for these and a small detachment under Gravett left to watch Buller in the north, all those who had taken part in the Dalmanutha battles were again collected on the railway. Here all was in a state of the most hopeless confusion. The presence of the aged President, now in his seventy-fifth year, and too old for rapid movement, made it essential to keep a considerable force on the railway for his protection; round him were gathered, besides the real workers, the drones and blood-suckers, who had always been the bane of his government, and who now, for want of more lucrative booty, lived royally on choice meats and wines, while the burghers in the fighting-line were already feeling the pinch of distress. Engines and rolling-stock, almost the whole of the normal equipment of the Free State and Transvaal railways, which the Boers had hitherto managed with great skill to retain, were blocking every station and siding of the short piece of line still left to them; and huge stacks of stores at Nelspruit, Hectorspruit, Kaap Muiden and Komati Poort seemed doomed, in spite of the looting which had already commenced, to fall into Lord Roberts's hands. To add to the confusion, the number of commandants seemed to have increased as the number of their troops diminished, especially in the case of the foreigners. The Germans alone, amounting altogether to perhaps 300 or 400 men, looked to three or four distinct corps commanders. Moreover, in the general disarray the commandants had little authority even over the few who recognised them, and crowds of idle and useless men were wandering about aimlessly. For the first time too the Boers were beginning to find themselves short of horses, so that the less enterprising had every inducement not to adventure far from the railway. As a final calamity Botha, on returning to the railway from Spitzkop, had fallen ill with

Disarray of the Boer forces on the railway.

an attack of quinsy, and was invalided at Hectorspruit. Even among the most unbending the feeling was one of utter depression, and the prospect of further resistance seemed almost hopeless.

Their courage revived by Steyn.

There were many of the leaders, of course, like Viljoen and the State Secretary Reitz, who were as determined as ever to fight for their independence, but their spirit does not seem to have had more than a very restricted influence on the minds of their followers. There was, however, one man whose presence succeeded, as always, in rousing the spirit of the Boers. Two days before the battle of Bergendal President Steyn had arrived at Machadodorp. On August 18, it will be remembered,* after separating from de Wet near Commando Nek, he had gone off to the north-east with most of the Free State officials escorted by forty young Transvaalers under Commandant Boshof, and, after his dangerous journey round the north of the British lines, had arrived safely at Machadodorp two days before the battle of Bergendal. From Nelspruit, whither he had retreated with President Kruger, he went to the various detachments along the line cheering them up and arousing anew their enthusiasm for the cause. "If you give in now," he exclaimed, "what answer can you give to your children when they ask you what you have done with the independence that you inherited?" Or after telling them that they need never despair, he would end up in a lighter vein to cheer their melancholy: "One thing I can promise you, for I will personally attend to it, that at the end you shall each receive a beautiful wife." But besides stirring speeches more practical measures were taken; and it seems possible to detect in them very much the same policy that animated Steyn in the Free State.

Measures adopted. President Kruger goes to Europe.

The most important decision taken was that President Kruger should go to Europe. It was obvious that the days of the Boers' possession of the railway were numbered; after that, if the fight was to be carried on at all, hurried marches in conditions of the utmost discomfort, and even of hardship, surprises or hairbreadth escapes, requiring the utmost rapidity,

* See chap. xii., p. 430.

would form its chief features. Kruger's was, it is true, a name still to conjure with, especially among the older burghers, and in the early stages of the war his energy and masterfulness had done more than anything to keep the burghers together and incite them to effective action. But now, in the kind of warfare before them, he could only be like a millstone round the necks of the fighters, hampering their movements; for his personal safety would naturally have to be a serious consideration with them. There was also a chance that his presence in Europe might arouse enthusiasm for the Boers among the enemies of England, whereas, if he were captured in South Africa, most of the other Boers would at once probably surrender. It was therefore decided by the government that Kruger should take leave of absence, nominally for six months, and that during his absence Schalk Burger, the vice-president, should assume the functions of president.*

He leaves Nelspruit on Sept. 11, and sails on Oct. 19.

On the 11th September Kruger took leave of his friends and departed for Lourenço Marques, where he was hospitably entertained by the Portuguese governor. On the 19th October he embarked on the Netherlands cruiser *Gelderland*, placed at his disposal by the young Queen of Holland and her government, to whom the British Government had already given assurances that it would make no effort to interfere with him. On that day he left South Africa for ever. Some months earlier the departure of Kruger would have been an irreparable blow to the Boer cause, but now, although a few of the more ignorant among them regarded his departure as a desertion of the cause, a view which the British authorities naturally encouraged to the best of their abilities, it was barely noticed by most of those who remained behind to fight. The young leaders in the field had many of them opposed his provocative and aggressive policy, which had brought on the war, and now they were fighting, not for his ambitious aims, but to retain their independence.

Slight effect of his departure.

On the same day that Kruger left for Lourenço Marques,

* The other members of the government who took the field were Reitz, who remained on as State Secretary, Louis Jacobsz, a young Pretoria attorney appointed acting State Attorney, P. de Villiers, acting Treasurer-General, and Brugman, acting Auditor-General.

Position of Transvaal forces at Hectorspruit compared to that of Free State forces in the Brandwater basin.

the Transvaal forces on the railway left Nelspruit for Hectorspruit, a station about fifty miles further east and only twenty from the Portuguese border. In some respects their situation was not unlike that of the Free State forces two months earlier in the Brandwater basin, and it is quite possible that Steyn, who was present on both occasions, may have been influenced by the success of his own and de Wet's escape in the advice he now tendered to the Transvaal leaders. From three directions British forces were closing in upon them, while the bushveld to the north and the Portuguese border to the east formed as effective barriers to the remaining exit. There seems no reason to suppose that when Steyn escaped from the meshes in the Free State he had any definite intention of leaving his comrades as a bait to Hunter, but to some extent this proved to be the result. Here again, whether consciously or unconsciously, a similar result was attained. It was resolved to post a fairly numerous force on the border at Komati Poort, while the rest of the fighters were to attempt escape by the north. The Komati Poort force was placed under Generals Coetsee and Pienaar,* neither of them men of much account, and was composed of all the "voetgangers," men whose inability to secure a horse indicated a cooling of enthusiasm, most of the foreign volunteers and of the Cape rebels, besides fugitives and deserters who had hitherto been skulking in the bush. Altogether, by the 16th September about 3,000 men were assembled at Komati Poort, nearly all of them men who for various reasons, whether incapacity, lack of enthusiasm, or weariness, were unlikely to prove useful combatants in the rough war to come.

Force placed at Komati Poort under Coetsee and Pienaar.

The remainder are the keenest fighters.

After this clearance only enthusiasts were left, and as was usual after each defeat of the Boers, an attempt was made to supplement their enthusiasm by a better organization. It was decreed that, in order to remove the confusion and insubordination due to the excessive proportion of officers to the men they were supposed to command, the burghers should be distributed into commandos of three

Attempts at reorganization.

* Pienaar had succeeded Viljoen as commandant of the Johannesburgers, but had in his turn been superseded by Viljoen's brother.

hundred, each under a commandant, with a field-cornet to every hundred men, and a corporal to ten. The choice of the commandants was to be left to the commandant-general, and all commandants and field-cornets left without commands by the new scheme were to be reduced to the ranks. Then, too, for the first time, a scale of pay was introduced, half the pay to be given every two months and half at the end of the war. * But no pay was ever received. With the commandos thus reorganized it was decided to make a dash for liberty. Steyn, who had no intention of being cut off from his own country, had been the first to go. His original plan was to escape by the shortest way, due south from the line, but French's rapid march made this route too hazardous. Accordingly, about the same date that Kruger left for Lourenço Marques, he had started towards the bushveld with an escort of 250 men under Boshof, travelling with a light baggage train and plenty of spare horses. He was accompanied by the other members of the Free State government, and took with him £500,000 in gold.

Then a dash for liberty.

Steyn starts north about Sept. 11.

On September 17 the Transvaal forces started from Hectorspruit in the same direction. They were divided into two parties, Botha himself, who had now recovered from his quinsy, taking charge of the government coach containing the state funds, and of its small escort, and Viljoen of the other party, amounting to about 2,000 men, accompanied by the only Long Tom that had not been destroyed and a few field-guns. Each of these parties had carefully selected transport wagons, drawn by the best animals still left and loaded with the pick of the stores accumulated along the railway. Before finally leaving the railway, the Boers blew up and sank in the Komati River nearly all their remaining guns, as artillery was likely to prove more of a burden than a help in their rapid movements, and set on fire the stores which

Sept. 17. Botha and Viljoen start north with about 2,500 men.

* The scale was as follows :—

	s.	*d.*	
Commandant-general	20	0	a day.
General	15	0	„ „
Commandant	10	0	„ „
Field-cornet	7	6	„ „
Rank and File	5	0	„ „

they did not carry away and which had escaped from the hands of the looters.

Their object to escape from the bushveld.

For all these parties trekking north from the railway the main object was to escape as rapidly as possible, before the hot weather set in, from the low veld, fever-stricken, infested with the tsetse fly fatal to horses, and in some parts waterless. With Buller at Spitzkop, and holding posts down to the railway, there were only two possible routes left whereby they could reach the high veld. The first was from the Sabi River to Pilgrim's Rest and Ohrigstad, over either Burgers Pass or Erasmushoogte Pass, both of them to the north of Buller's position at Spitzkop; the other involved a much longer way round through the bushveld up to the Crocodile River and through Leydsdorp and Oud Agatha to Pietersburg. Of these two the first was obviously the one to be aimed at. Once on the high veld at Pilgrim's Rest, the Boers would again be on healthy ground and in communication with the commandos under Erasmus and Grobler, who were then unmolested in the country north of Pretoria. By this way also it would soon be possible for them to join hands with De la Rey in the west. If, however, the whole force were obliged to trek all the way round to Pietersburg through the low country, the other Boers, cut off from communication with their leaders for at least a month, might meanwhile have given up the struggle in despair. The great difficulty before them in attempting the more direct route was that Buller at Spitzkop was well placed to move up men to block the two passes by one of which they would be obliged to proceed.

In spite of warning from Delagoa Bay,

On the 10th September news was sent to Lord Roberts from Delagoa Bay of Steyn's intention to move north; on the 14th he was told of Viljoen's proposed route to Pietersburg, and on the 16th further details were forwarded, with the hint that a check from the north or an attack from the west by Buller would drive the Boers back into the tsetse fly district which they were anxious at all costs to avoid. But these warnings were of no avail.

Lord Roberts does not fully realise the position.

Since Carrington's failure to reach Pietersburg at an earlier stage of the war, the idea of occupying it seems to

have passed out of Lord Roberts's calculations. Baden-Powell, it is true, had by a surprise march on the day before the battle of Bergendal captured Nylstroom, which is nearly half-way between Pretoria and Pietersburg. But at the time Lord Roberts felt that he could not spare the troops to hold the railway so far north, nor did he then feel very pressingly the importance of holding Pietersburg; he therefore ordered Baden-Powell to withdraw. The chance was not again taken for many months, during which Pietersburg remained a most useful point of concentration for the Boer commandos. But although the possession of Pietersburg would at this time have been of advantage to the English, it was a matter of quite secondary importance compared to the immediate occupation of the approaches from the low to the high veld north of Spitzkop. Unfortunately, Lord Roberts, perhaps unduly influenced by the idea that in crushing all opposition on the railway he would have practically concluded the war, paid insufficient attention to the escape of Botha, Viljoen and Steyn. By recalling Ian Hamilton to assist Pole-Carew on the railway, unnecessarily as it proved, he left Buller without sufficient reserve to be ready at all points of approach from the bushveld.

Sept. 26. Buller just misses Botha at Burgers Pass.

This general still had two brigades of infantry and two of cavalry north of the line, besides thirty-seven guns, but with this force he was holding eleven posts from Machadodorp through Lydenburg to Spitzkop. Nevertheless, his positions were so strong and so easy to hold with a few men that he himself proposed to advance from Spitzkop towards Pilgrim's Rest. Lord Roberts approved of this on September 18. But already it was too late to intercept Steyn, who had only the day before passed through on his way to Ohrigstad; there might still, however, be time to catch Botha and Viljoen. But Buller, unaware of the need for haste, spent another week in withdrawing men from three posts between Lydenburg and Spitzkop and in collecting supplies for the move. On the 26th he started from the Sabi River drift, his point of concentration, towards Burgers Pass, held by Gravett's small force, which had remained watching Buller since Botha's departure on the 8th. Not far off, and

just west of the pass, Buller could see the dust and wagons of another Boer column on the way to Pilgrim's Rest. This was Botha's. On the previous day Viljoen and Botha had arrived at the foot of the pass which would lead them to the high veld. Here they learned from Gravett that Buller was already on his way and might succeed in cutting them off. Botha immediately decided that it would be impossible to get the whole force with all the convoy over the pass in time to escape Buller, and that the only safe course would be for him and Viljoen to separate. It was obviously essential that he himself should get into communication with the other commandos as soon as possible, so taking the government and the State treasure and the small escort with him, and ordering Gravett to keep Buller busy as long as possible, he escaped over the pass just in the nick of time. To Viljoen with the remainder was assigned the laborious journey round by the foot of the mountains to Pietersburg. Gravett kept Buller employed in capturing Burgers Pass long enough to prevent his overtaking Botha. After a well-executed night march, Colonel Byng seized the top of Pilgrim's Hill with his South African Light Horse, and Dundonald occupied Pilgrim's Rest on the 27th. But after Botha's escape this position was of no importance. On October 1 Sir Redvers reached Kruger's Post, where Brocklehurst, sent up by Howard from Lydenburg, had already preceded him. But Brocklehurst's precautions against attack had been defective, for just when Buller's long train of transport had reached the village, which the cavalry had been occupying for a day, his bivouac was shelled for the last time by a Long Tom and two other guns, one officer of the Devons being killed and another wounded, while eight casualties occurred in the Light Horse. Major David Henderson, with 200 men of Brocklehurst's cavalry, attempted to capture the Long Tom by a night surprise, but on reaching its position of the previous day found that it had been removed.

Sept. 12–24. Pole-Carew and Ian Hamilton advance along

After the operations on the two flanks the only real difficulty for the advance of Lord Roberts's central column was the nature of the country, which made the march extremely arduous. Pole-Carew started on the 12th from Water-

val Onder. Detaching the 18th Brigade under Stephenson to hold the stations on the line between Waterval Boven and Nelspruit, he went on with the Guards, Pilkington's West Australians and some of Henry's M.I., who had now rejoined him, over the difficult road by Kaapsche Hoop, through Avoca on the Barberton line and thence up to Kaap Muiden and Komati Poort. The road he took from the railway valley ascends 2,400 feet to Kaapsche Hoop, and thence descends nearly the same distance into the Barberton valley. In parts the track almost disappeared, and on one occasion the Guards took five hours to cut a path through five miles of tangled bush. Supplies, which were running short, were luckily provided by French from Barberton, but the water was not always sufficient, and the last twenty miles over the Lebombo flats were a waterless desert. Stacks of stores, many smouldering as the result of Boer attempts to destroy them, were captured at stations on the way; the West Australians, sent out on a flank march from Avoca, succeeded in taking some prisoners, rifles and wagons; and at the French Bobs mine and at Hectorspruit, eleven of the guns blown up by the Boers were discovered in the river. During this march Ian Hamilton, with the 19th Brigade and ten guns, was following Pole-Carew along the same route at twenty-four hours' interval. His second brigade under Cunningham had arrived at Belfast from Pretoria on September 9th, and was left to guard Machadodorp and the neighbouring country. On the 18th September Lord Roberts moved his headquarters to Nelspruit, and Lord Kitchener came up to supervise personally the repair of the line.

the railway to Komati Poort.

On the 24th Pole-Carew reached Komati Poort, to find it unoccupied and the bridge over the river intact. There was, indeed, not very much that Coetsee's and Pienaar's 3,000 men could have done beyond damaging the bridge, delaying for a short time the English troops just at the end of their course, and creating considerable difficulties for the Portuguese by fighting on the border. The Portuguese had almost as much interest as Lord Roberts in saving the Komati Poort bridge from destruction, as that would mean

Sept. 24. Pole-Carew finds that Coetsee and Pienaar have abandoned Komati Poort, chiefly owing to representations of the Portuguese.

a further interruption of their lucrative traffic with the Transvaal, and they were very anxious to avoid the complications which would ensue if the Boers were driven into their territory and pursued by English troops. They set up lines of flags along the frontier so that there should be no mistake about it, and sent up most of the 1,500 European troops of their own in the province to protect its inviolability; they even gave a conditional permission to Lord Roberts to land troops at Delagoa Bay so as to take the Boers in rear. No use was actually made of this permission, as the Boers took the hint which the Portuguese gave them, that unless they moved away six miles from the boundary, English troops would be landed against them; but the Portuguese authorities co-operated heartily with Commander Crowe in the more diplomatic methods he employed to overcome the Boer resistance. Emissaries were sent to the Boers with the official assurance that all who came over the border quietly and surrendered their arms to the Portuguese officials would be treated well, and if in want, relieved, and that the foreigners would be conveyed to their own countries. Moreover, before his departure, Kruger was induced, in return for the hospitality shown to him by the governor, to write a letter to Coetsee and Pienaar forbidding the destruction of the bridge. The men on the border were never very enthusiastic for fighting, and under the assurances from the Portuguese, over 700 men had crossed the frontier by midnight on the 18th and laid down their arms; by the evening of the 20th nearly all the foreigners and many more Boers had crossed, and on the 22nd Pienaar himself, having secured the bridge, blown up the Long Tom and destroyed as many stores and as much railway material as possible, went over with most of the remainder. The material of war brought over the frontier included two field guns, one pom-pom, two Maxims, 1,800 rifles and carbines, and over six million rounds of ammunition, besides forty tons of powder and dynamite. In all 2,500 men crossed the border, of whom 2,000 were destitute. Coetsee, who from the first had energetically opposed this flight, finding himself left with a mere residuum of 300 men, considered resistance useless, and, seizing all available

horses and such remains of stores and ammunition as he could, made off rapidly to the north just in time to escape capture.

Thus Pole-Carew, on his arrival, found Komati Poort almost deserted. Smouldering stacks of stores, thirty engines and some 1,500 trucks laden with stores and ammunition were discovered. Next day Hamilton arrived, Lord Roberts shortly afterwards returned to Pretoria, and on the 28th a grand review was held at Komati Poort in honour of the King of Portugal's birthday. Kitchener was busy for some weeks reorganising and improving the traffic, a task much facilitated by the large supply of trucks and engines.

Results of the last two months' operations.

The result of the last two months' operations in the Eastern Transvaal was that the Boers were now entirely cut off from their base of supply and from communication with the world outside. They had been obliged to sacrifice nearly 3,000 of their fighters, who had retreated into Portuguese territory, and to destroy almost the whole of their artillery and vast quantities of stores. The President had been forced to retire from the struggle, which most of the foreign enthusiasts had also given up, and all the representatives of foreign armies with the Boers had shown their appreciation of the situation by returning to their own countries. On the other hand, hardly any impression had been made on the really strenuous members of Botha's commandos. All of them had made good their escape from the British forces, and were still as determined as ever to maintain the struggle for independence.

CHAPTER XIV

CLOSE OF LORD ROBERTS'S COMMAND

I

September. Lord Roberts's belief that the war was practically over after he had reached Komati Poort.

WITH the capture of the railway to Komati Poort and the surrender or dispersal of the last compact and centrally organised Boer force, Lord Roberts thought that, for all practical purposes, the war was at an end. As early as the beginning of September, and shortly after the battle of Bergendal, he put this view very strongly before the Boers in a proclamation announcing President Kruger's flight, and in two letters which he addressed to General Botha and afterwards published for the information of the commandos. In these he called upon them to give up a useless struggle, which by this time had degenerated into mere guerilla warfare, the only result of which would be continued suffering and useless distress for their own countrymen and women. Generals, no doubt, often try to persuade their opponents that it is useless for them to continue the struggle without sufficient grounds for their contention, but in this case Lord Roberts certainly thought that it was only a question of a few months at most before the country would be brought to complete submission. So strongly was he persuaded of this, that he gave the home Government to understand that the war was practically over, and announced that he could spare some of his troops from the campaign.

October. Generals and troops return home.

On October 6th Buller's column, which had returned to Lydenburg on the 2nd, was broken up, as there seemed no further reason to retain the Natal Army as a separate command. On that day General Lyttelton was given charge of the north-eastern district of the Transvaal, and General

Sir Redvers Buller returned to England after the completion of a year's arduous and responsible work. His parting with the men who had stood by him in good and evil days with such steadfast courage was touching. They crowded down to the road along which he and his staff passed slowly away, cheering him to the echo. For the first time in the campaign the General's impassive face showed signs of emotion at this spontaneous tribute to the power which, whatever his faults may have been, he undoubtedly had of inspiring and keeping the enthusiastic devotion of the rank and file in his command. In the same month General Hutton gave up his mounted infantry brigade and returned home. He had previously proved his powers of organisation in peace time; during his six months in South Africa he further established his claim to high command by his quickness of decision and his energy in the field. Moreover, in spite of a slightly didactic method with the men, he had shown an enthusiastic appreciation, not always found in English generals, of the opportunity which this campaign gave for drawing the various colonies closer to the mother-country and to one another, by stimulating the sense of comradeship and of generous emulation among the different units of his own representative brigade.

During the months of October and November the Household Cavalry, the whole of the C.I.V. regiment with its battery, the Royal Canadian regiment and the Royal Canadian Dragoons, and other bodies of oversea colonials and South African volunteers were allowed to go home. Besides these, the Guards and two regular batteries were actually under orders for England during October, but were eventually detained.

December. Lord Roberts returns home.

His own task Lord Roberts now looked upon as ended. This, too, was the view of the Government, who, in the last week of September, informed him that he had been appointed Commander-in-Chief in England, in succession to Lord Wolseley, whose term of office had expired. He therefore made all preparations to relinquish the command in South Africa at the end of October. Owing to the serious illness of his elder daughter, he was unable to leave the Transvaal till the end of November; but before that date

Lord Kitchener had already, to some extent, succeeded to his duties. After a brief visit to Natal he sailed to Cape Town, where he had an enthusiastic reception, and on December 11 embarked for England in H.M.S. *Canada*. On landing he was at once summoned to Osborne by the Queen, who created him an Earl and a Knight of the Garter.

Sept.–Oct. A general election again returns the Unionist Government to power.

Relying on this satisfactory aspect of affairs in South Africa, Lord Salisbury's Government thought it a suitable time to dissolve Parliament and call upon the electors for a fresh lease of power. They took full credit to themselves, not unnaturally, perhaps, for the apparent success of one of the greatest military undertakings upon which Great Britain had ever embarked, and felt entitled to demand authority to settle the permanent administration of the new colonies. Parliament was accordingly dissolved on September 25. The electors, no doubt much impressed by the declarations given to them as to the successful issue of the struggle, and reluctant to entrust the management of South African affairs to a party which had always opposed the policy of which the war was the outcome, again returned the Government to power. The Unionist majority was less, indeed, than that of the previous election of 1895, but, amounting as it did to 134, seemed a satisfactory response to the Government's appeal.* Possibly the nation, after their vast and most unforeseen effort in continuing the struggle on so great a scale, would not have extended their confidence so generously to the Government which had conducted it, had they realized that the war was by no means ended.

Justification for the belief that the war was over.

There was undoubtedly great justification for the opinion that little remained to be accomplished. Besides Lord Roberts and his military advisers, men who knew South Africa well were equally confident that the war was over. The Dutch at the Cape were convinced of the real completeness of the British victories; and on the English side, acute observers thought at the beginning of September that a week or ten days at most would see the end of the war. Mr. Rhodes himself, in a speech which he delivered to the South African League at the beginning of October, assumed, as a matter of

* In 1895 the Unionist Government's majority was 152.

course, that the military situation might be dismissed and that the most pressing question of practical politics was to discover the best means of welding the two opposing races into one harmonious whole under the British flag.

Oct.–Nov. Nevertheless there are ominous signs in South Africa.

Nevertheless, even during the last two months of Lord Roberts's tenure of the South African command, there were many indications that the war was not so near its close as these sanguine estimates had led most people to believe. The detailed history of these months belongs to the next volume, but a brief epitome will explain the situation. De Wet was reorganising the Free State commandos as early as September, and in October again took up the offensive with vigour. Before November was out, in spite of a damaging check at Bothaville, he had laid formal siege to two strong garrison towns, had taken one by open assault, and was threatening Cape Colony with invasion in force, while from his followers came a whole series of sporadic attacks on fortified posts and convoys. In the Transvaal also the symptoms were ominous. French, during October, made a long and profitless march from Barberton through Carolina and Heidelberg to Pretoria. In its course he had, it is true, more trouble in preserving his own transport from exhaustion than in dealing with the enemy who hovered about him; but it was plain that his immunity from serious attack was due more to his opponents' unwillingness to interfere with so large a force under so redoubtable a general, than to any inclination on their part to submission. Methuen, Hart, Clements, and other generals in the west, and Lyttelton in the east were all busily engaged; and one of Lord Roberts's last acts was to send Paget against Viljoen, who had raised a formidable gathering in the north. The railways everywhere were subjected to constant attack and damage; indeed the very troops returning home found it unsafe to travel at night along the main line, and occasionally were called out to deal with marauders in the neighbourhood of their own trains.

Lord Roberts does not fully appreciate what remains to be done,

Without doubt, Lord Roberts, quick and alert as he was, failed to grasp the significance of these symptoms; to the very end he thought, after the dispersal of the main Boer army under Botha, that all the rest was a mere matter of

police, and that all difficulties could be solved by the various columns, to which he assigned the charge of districts in the conquered colonies.* Even at Cape Town on his way home

* As early as August 25 the following circular was issued by the Chief of the Staff. The instructions illustrate the prevalent idea on the headquarters staff that the suppression of a few rebels was the only task left to be accomplished.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR GENERAL OFFICERS COMMANDING COLUMNS IN ORANGE RIVER COLONY AND THE TRANSVAAL.

1. In order to ensure public security in the country, it is considered advisable that mobile columns should act in certain districts with the object of putting down any open rebellion, of removing all horses and forage, and of collecting cattle and live stock belonging to all those who after laying down their arms and taking the oath of neutrality have again gone on commando, or whose sons may have gone on commando.

2. Although rough limits have been assigned to each column, where necessity arises the nearest force available should act irrespective of the boundaries laid down.

3. Each commander will immediately take steps against any known rebel in his district, and will be careful, by organising a system of agents for intelligence throughout his district, to keep himself fully informed of any disaffection.

4. Whilst giving protection to loyal inhabitants in his district, the general officer commanding will see that the country is so denuded of forage and supplies that no means of subsistence is left for any commando attempting to make any incursions.

LIMITS OF THE VARIOUS DISTRICTS.

1. *Northern Column—Maj.-Genl. A. H. Paget commanding.*
This column is based on the Pietersburg Railway, and has charge of the country between the Crocodile and Olifant's River, from Waterval northwards.

2. *Commando Nek Column—Maj.-Genl. R. A. P. Clements, D.S.O., A.D.C., commanding.*
This column is based on Commando Nek, and has charge of the Hebron, Rustenburg, and Hekpoort districts, and of the country between Pretoria, Krugersdorp, and Johannesburg.

3. *Potchefstroom Column—Maj.-Genl. A. F. Hart, C.B., commanding.*
Based on the Potchefstroom Railway, and operates north of the Vaal to Losberg, the Gatsrand, Krugersdorp, Ventersdorp, and Klerksdorp.

4. *Western Column—Lt.-Genl. Lord Methuen, K.C.V.O., C.B., C.M.G., commanding.*
Based on Mafeking and Zeerust, and operates to Lichtenburg, Tafelkop, Rustenburg, and to the left bank of Crocodile River below its junction with Elands River.

The above distribution does not affect the command of troops on the

at the beginning of December, and almost on the eve of one of the greatest defeats which befell the British arms during the war, he reiterated the opinion that the war was "practically over."

In truth Lord Roberts now, as all through the war, was so fully able to deal with any combinations in the field which the Boers might bring against him, that he never fully realised the nature of the Boer resistance. He could not understand their desire to prolong the struggle, which seemed to him, and which no doubt really was hopeless. In the first place, he hardly appreciated the fact that their strength was not to be measured solely by their armies in the field. The Boers were never dismayed for long by a dispersal of their organised forces, for they always looked on guerilla warfare as the real method of dealing with the invader, a method which enabled every able-bodied man to take part in the struggle whenever he felt inclined. Secondly, Lord Roberts was misled by the promptitude with which surrenders followed each of his successes.

or the nature of the Boer resistance.

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lines of railway and responsibility for its safety as already defined elsewhere.

ORANGE RIVER COLONY DISTRICTS.

1. *Eastern District—Lt.-Genl. Sir Leslie Rundle, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., Commanding.*

(i.) *Northern Column.*—Based on Vrede, and operating to Reitz, Frankfort, Standerton, and the Natal Railway.

(ii.) *Southern Column.*—Based on Harrismith, and operating to Fouriesburg, Bethlehem, Reitz, and eastwards through Newmarket.

2. *Central District—Lt.-Genl. Sir A. Hunter, K.C.B., D.S.O., commanding.*

(i.) *Northern Column.*—Maj.-Genl. A. H. MacDonald, C.B., D.S.O., A.D.C.—Based on Heilbron, and operating to Frankfort, Reitz, Lindley, Kroonstad, and the east of main line railway.

(ii.) *Southern Column.*—Maj.-Genl. Bruce Hamilton.—Based on Kroonstadt, and operating to Lindley, Senekal, Winburg, Ventersburg, and east of railway.

3. *Western Column—Maj.-Genl. C. E. Knox commanding.*

Based on Kroonstad, and operating thence along the main line to the Vaal, and throughout the country between the railway and the river as far as Bothaville.

The above distribution does not affect the command of troops on the lines of railway and responsibility for its safety as already defined elsewhere.

Many of these surrenders were due to a genuine belief that it would be wrong to fight any longer against fate, but most were subject to the implied condition, which was often not fulfilled, that those surrendering would be protected from the temptation of rejoining their friends still on commando. Above all, he did not make sufficient allowance for the patriotic stubbornness of the great majority of the Boers, nor realise that they were doing, and intended to do, exactly what the British people, or any people with a spark of self-respect, would do under similar circumstances. It was useless explaining to such men, just as it would have been useless explaining to Englishmen under like conditions, that they would have fuller liberty, and a better form of government under the British flag than under their own. The fact remained that they cared deeply for their independence, and wished to govern themselves in their own way, in a country which they had conquered with their own arms. Lord Roberts's inability to understand this spirit cannot be better exemplified than by the succession of proclamations which he issued from his first entry into the Free State till the end of his term in command of the South African forces

Illustrated by his proclamations to the Boers.

On entering the Free State in February, 1900, he issued his first proclamation to the burghers of that Republic, declaring in terms customary in like cases that the quarrel of the British nation was rather with the Boer Government than with the people, whom they were "anxious to preserve from the evils brought upon them by the wrongful action of their Government." It warned them to desist from hostility, and promised that those found staying in their homes "would not be made to suffer in their persons or property on account of their having taken up arms in obedience to the order of their Government." It promised that everything requisitioned would be paid for on the spot at market rates, and announced that orders had been issued prohibiting soldiers from entering private houses, molesting the civil population, or injuring property. That was the unexceptionable spirit in which the invasion of the Republican territories was begun, and, despite the bitter feelings which had been caused by the Boer ravages in

Natal, these humane and laudable intentions were for long carried into practice with such excessive regard for the interests of the enemy and the rights of private property that British soldiers were subjected to many privations which might have been avoided had their officers allowed them to diverge from a strict interpretation of their orders.

On March 15, another proclamation offered to burghers, who laid down their arms and took an oath to abstain from further participation in the war, a free pass to return to their homes, and a promise that they would not be made prisoners of war, or deprived of their property. In the northern districts of Cape Colony the inhabitants were at the same time warned that any further act of rebellion would be treated with the utmost rigour. Again, on crossing the Vaal, Lord Roberts proclaimed that "personal safety and freedom from molestation" were guaranteed to the non-combatant population of the South African Republic, and recapitulated for the benefit of the Transvaal the advantages already offered to Free Staters on taking the oath to abstain from further hostilities.

But there were already signs that this lenient policy was not without difficulties; and contemporaneously with the last proclamation the depredations of guerilla bands upon the railways caused the issue of the first proclamation containing anything in the nature of a threat. The Transvaalers were warned that though every possible protection would be given to them, and that everything taken would be paid for, yet that residents in any locality would be held responsible in their persons and property for any damage to railways or telegraphs or any violence to British troops, which occurred near their homes.

On June 1, a proclamation declared that, inasmuch as the Orange River Colony was now British territory, all inhabitants thereof found in arms within fourteen days would "be liable to be dealt with as rebels and to suffer in person and property accordingly." At the same time it was ordered that all arms should be given up. This endeavour to attribute to the fighting burghers a different *status* from that which they had possessed before, by virtue

of a proclamation of annexation which the Boers considered null and void, was not a judicious measure. The death penalty was never enforced upon burghers from the fact of their being taken in arms, nor was it ever intended to be enforced, while few rifles were given up, and the failure of the proclamation to effect its declared purpose tended rather towards the spread of a belief that the British were unable to enforce their own edicts.

On June 16, as a consequence of the continued destruction of railways, a proclamation of greater severity was issued to the effect that since such acts could not be done "without the knowledge or connivance of the neighbouring inhabitants, and principal civil residents," they would be held responsible for aiding and abetting the offenders, would be made prisoners of war, and that their houses would be burnt if the practice continued. This was amplified by a second edict of the same character on June 19, which, among other things, enacted that residents in the various districts might be carried on trains, as hostages for their compatriots' good behaviour. This provision, however, was repealed a few weeks later. Both these proclamations were founded on precedents set by the Germans in 1871. Their uselessness in the present instance arose from the fact that the persons who were ordained to suffer were not the mobile commandos who did the damage, but peaceful Boers who had surrendered.

During July and August it was found that burghers who had surrendered were resuming hostilities, and Lord Roberts began to realise that the policy of trust in them was a mistake. On August 14, therefore, a new proclamation informed the Transvaalers that personal safety and freedom from molestation were no longer guaranteed except to burghers who had already taken the oath, and that, with the same exception, passes would no longer be issued to enable burghers surrendering to return to their homes; that all burghers who had not taken the oath would be regarded as prisoners of war and "transported or otherwise dealt with as I may determine." Lord Roberts went on to say that buildings harbouring the enemy would be liable to be razed to the ground, and that burghers failing to

acquaint the British with the presence of the enemy upon their farms would be regarded as aiding and abetting the enemy. A similar edict of September 1 applied the same rules to the Orange River Colony. By Government notices of September 22 and 28 it was stated that burghers voluntarily surrendering would not be sent out of South Africa; that stock and supplies of men on commando or of those who had broken their oath were to be taken and no receipt given; and that the houses of leaders of bands of snipers would be burnt. As a consequence of this proclamation a considerable number of farmhouses were burnt. But, owing to the outcry which this policy aroused in England, on November 18, "as there appeared to be some misunderstanding with reference to the burning of farms and breaking of dams," Lord Roberts issued the following order, which in effect, though not admittedly so, constituted a change of policy: "No farm is to be burnt except for an act of treachery, or when troops have been fired on from the premises, or as punishment for breaking of railway or telegraph line, or when they have been used as bases of operation for raids, and then only with the direct consent of the general officer commanding, which is to be given in writing; the mere fact of a burgher being absent on commando is on no account to be used as a reason for burning the house. All cattle, wagons, and foodstuffs are to be removed from all farms; if that is found to be impossible, they are to be destroyed, whether the owner be present or not." Such was, in brief, the substance of the guidance that had been given to commanders in the field as to their treatment of the Boers.

Explanation and result of conflicting proclamations.

The reason for these changes of policy is obvious. At the beginning, Lord Roberts, with much justification, believed that the Boers were genuinely anxious to surrender. On finding that he was mistaken, he attempted to intimidate oath-breakers and even consistent fighters by a show of authority which had no effective sanction of force. The mistake of scattering a litter of conflicting proclamations over the country was that they were practically without effect. The almost paternal tenderness of the earlier edicts

and the Draconian severity of the latter were equally treated with derision and contempt. Some Boers read one proclamation, and some another; the majority of the fighting burghers never read any at all. The only enduring memory was that while one British commander would promise protection, which he was unable to afford, to burghers who remained on their farms, another would carry them off as prisoners of war, thus causing them to make perfectly baseless but apparently reasonable accusations against their enemy's good faith.

Bad policy of farm-burning.

It would no doubt have been more truly lenient, and have caused less suffering in the end, if from the outset all men capable of bearing arms who wished to surrender had been confined with their families to towns under the constant supervision of British troops. They would thus have had no temptation to return to the commandos. In that case it might have been good policy to burn down farmsteads and destroy crops as an act of military necessity, in order to prevent the men left in the field from profiting by them. But the policy fitfully adopted after the beginning of June of burning down farmhouses and destroying crops as a measure of intimidation had nothing to recommend it, and no other measure aroused such deep and lasting feelings of resentment. The Dutch race is not one that can easily be beguiled by promises, or moved by threats; farm-burning as a policy of intimidation totally failed, as any one acquainted with the Dutch race and Dutch history could have foreseen. British officers who had served on the Indian frontier had been accustomed to the destruction of the towns and villages of the tribesmen as a normal act of war, inseparable from the conduct of hostilities. In the ordinary course a frontier campaign begins with a raid upon British territory, is followed by the forward march of an avenging column, and ends by the defeat of the tribesmen in the field, the destruction of their towers and dwellings, and the submission of the foe after the imposition of a fine. The application of a system which, even in India, has long provoked criticism and disapproval, to the conditions of a campaign against a white race defending their homes with a

bravery and resource which have rightly won the admiration of the world, was the least happy of Lord Roberts's inspirations, and must be plainly set down as a serious error of judgment, due to the fact that he persisted in regarding the Boers, when once their chief towns had been occupied, not as regular combatants, but as rebels who rather required punishment than defeat

II

But although Lord Roberts misapprehended the strength and nature of the Boer resistance, and left work for his successor not destined to be accomplished without eighteen more months of arduous fighting, he had nevertheless, when he left the country, brought the war to a stage at which it would be impossible for the English to avoid completing their victory, given their determination to carry on the struggle with no abatement of energy.

But Lord Roberts had brought the war to a stage where victory was inevitable.

The history of the remaining months of the war served to prove Lord Roberts's wisdom in securing, from the first, the great trunk lines of communication. For an army fighting thousands of miles away from its first base, against a scattered and highly mobile adversary, the possession of these lines was indispensable. As long as the English held the line from Cape Town to Pretoria, from Pretoria to Delagoa Bay, and from Pretoria to Durban, so long would they always be able to supply themselves and to maintain their grip on the country, and at the same time to cut off the Boers from all regular means of securing fresh supplies or reinforcements; thus practically limiting the struggle till the day when all the supplies to be obtained from the farms had been exhausted. This fact is the real justification for the rapid advances to Pretoria and to Komati Poort, however much it may be questioned whether Lord Roberts might not have dealt harder blows to the Boers in the process of securing the railways. The failure to reduce the Boer forces during the last few months of his command no doubt helped to prolong the war, but a failure to occupy the railways might have proved fatal.

His wisdom in securing the railways and in annexing the republics

Another important point achieved was that Lord Roberts

by his great marches, in which he traversed both republics almost from end to end, fully justified himself in the important step of annexing the republics to the British Crown. He has been criticised for taking this step before the complete subjugation of the country was an accomplished fact, but with little justice. The annexation of the republics at the earliest possible moment was a necessity, if only in order to prove to the Boers and to the world in general, that England meant to finish her task. However much opinions differed as to the causes and initial justice of the war, it was agreed upon by both parties in England, by the leaders of the Liberal opposition quite as much as by the Government, that annexation was the only possible solution when the war had once begun. Most of the colonies also, from the first, had strongly supported this solution. It was only just therefore to give the Boers warning at the earliest possible opportunity of England's fixed resolve, so that they should not continue the struggle under the false impression that they might retain their independence.

Administration of the conquered territory.

Besides proclaiming the annexation of the two States, Lord Roberts had taken steps at an early stage to make it plain that the English intended to administer them as far as possible by regular methods of civil government. At the beginning of October, enlistment was begun for a force of South African Constabulary of a semi-military nature, not unlike the North-West Mounted Police in Canada. The command of this force was given to General Baden-Powell, and the other officers were mostly seconded from the regular Army. It was to have duties extending over both the new colonies. In the Orange River Colony it will be remembered that one of Lord Roberts's first acts on entering Bloemfontein had been to appoint General Pretyman military governor and to give him a general supervision over the gradually extending area of occupied territory.* In spite of the disturbed state of the country, by the end of November a satisfactory record had been made of progress accomplished. Thirteen district commissioners had been appointed, whose spheres of activity

* See chap. i., p. 11.

nominally covered almost the whole Colony; as long as they were not disturbed by Boer marauders they administered justice, re-established schools, and collected a small amount of revenue. In Bloemfontein itself, although martial law still existed, many signs of regular government were apparent. Customs were collected, the post office and banks were open, and the administration of orphans' estates was carried on by the late government's officials. In the Transvaal, civil government had not made the same progress as in the sister colony. A few district commissioners were appointed in such places as Zeerust,* but their duration of office was apt to be cut short by the necessity of abandoning to the Boers the headquarters of their district. In Pretoria General Maxwell exercised a benevolent autocracy, and Sir Alfred Milner's Imperial Secretary, Mr. Fiddes, advised Lord Roberts on civil questions. In Johannesburg it was found impossible, as long as the railways were required almost exclusively for military supplies and the movement of troops, to allow the mines to resume work or the leading business men to return, so that Colonel Mackenzie's chief duties consisted in controlling and feeding the somewhat disorderly population left in the town, and in recovering and preserving the property of refugees. Two commissions were also sent out by the home Government: one under Mr. Arnold Forster, to investigate the facilities for land settlement in both colonies; and another under Mr. Alfred Lyttelton, to examine the conditions under which concessions and monopolies had been granted by President Kruger's government in the Transvaal.

Events in Natal and Cape Colony. Resignation of the Schreiner ministry.

Natal, in spite of stray commandos on the borders, had been entirely freed from rebellion, and in Cape Colony there had been no further sign of rebellion since the suppression of the Prieska and Griqualand West risings, in spite of threatening language and open expression of discontent at meetings of the Bond party. Moreover, the difficulties of administration had been to a certain extent removed by the resignation of the Schreiner ministry. After the suppression of the rebellion a discussion arose with the home Government as to the punishment to be meted out to

* See chap. vi., p. 225.

rebels, the total number of whom was estimated at 10,000. The Schreiner ministry, arguing from the precedent of the Canadian rebellion of 1837–8, in the first instance advocated clemency to all but the ringleaders. In answer to this proposal Mr. Chamberlain pointed out that the circumstances were very different, as the rebels in Cape Colony had constitutional government and no grievance of their own, but had nevertheless joined the forces of an enemy invading the Queen's dominions; whereas, in Canada, the rebels had legitimate grievances which were removed as a consequence of the rebellion; as a pure matter of self-defence it was necessary to mark the gravity of rebellion. After some interchange of correspondence with the home Government, Mr. Schreiner himself, supported by his Attorney-General, Mr. Solomon, and by Mr. Herholdt, proposed as a compromise between clemency and the sterner measures originally suggested by Mr. Chamberlain, that while the leaders should be subject to severe punishments for high treason, the rank and file of the rebels, when condemned by special courts appointed for the purpose, should be let off with no further punishment than disfranchisement for five years. This proposal met the views of the home Government and of Sir Alfred Milner, but the three remaining members of the Cabinet, Mr. Merriman, Mr. Te Water, and Mr. Sauer, frankly objected to any punishment at all for the rebels. In this they were irreconcilable, and, as they had Mr. Hofmeyr and the whole strength of the Afrikander Bond behind them, the Cabinet split on this rock. Mr. Schreiner was succeeded as Premier by Sir Gordon Sprigg, the veteran Cape politician, who formed a Progressive ministry without the aid of the Bond, which had the majority in the Legislative Assembly. However, helped by one or two of the late ministry, such as Mr. Schreiner and Mr. Solomon, and by a few of its former supporters, Sir Gordon succeeded in passing, on October 12, by a majority of nine votes, an Act of Indemnity and Special Tribunals, substantially the same as Mr. Schreiner's.

Character of Mr. Schreiner.

The failure of the Schreiner ministry lightened Sir Alfred Milner's heavy task, and was at that time a great advantage

THE HON. W. P. SCHREINER, K.C., C.M.G.,
PRIME MINISTER OF CAPE COLONY, 1898-1900.
Photo by Elliott & Fry.

to the British cause, for half the Cabinet almost openly sympathised with the republics. But the eclipse, for the time being at any rate, of Mr. Schreiner himself from Cape politics was a great loss. The word "trimmer" has acquired an evil significance in political language, but there is no one to whom Mr. Schreiner can better be compared than to the first "trimmer," Lord Halifax. His rigid conscientiousness and his subtle mind made it impossible for him to be a hot-headed partisan on any side, for he could never blind himself to the good points which every cause must contain. It was said, for instance, of one of his speeches in the Assembly, that it was cheered by both parties, though never at the same time. He had always looked upon the war as a calamity, and thought it might have been avoided. Accordingly, up to the eve of hostilities, he had obstructed, as far as possible, the most necessary measures of defence, lest they should seem provocative to the Boers. But, the die once cast, he was invaluable to Sir Alfred Milner, who always appealed with success to his sense of duty as a servant of the Crown in a colony invaded by the Queen's enemies. Thus always, after persuasion, he not only approved, but even succeeded in carrying his Cabinet's approval, of the proclamation of martial law in the districts overrun with rebellion. Although at first the subject of considerable obloquy from the English party in the Cape, and latterly from the Bond party, in the end he received the respect of all men, from the Governor downwards, for his sincerity and his valiant attempts at peace and conciliation.*

Great effect of Lord Roberts's victories in England and on the Continent.

Outside South Africa the effect of Lord Roberts's victories was equally great. In England the Unionist Government's majority was gained chiefly on the strength of them. On the Continent the danger of intervention from powers unfriendly to England was entirely removed, when once they recognised that she not only meant to carry on the work she had undertaken, but had also found a man capable of the task. Admiration for England's determined efforts and for Lord Roberts's capacity and vigour accounted indeed as much for the revulsion of feeling in Europe as the con-

* See also vol. iii., pp. 88–91.

sideration that, after the occupation of Pretoria and the capture of the Delagoa Bay railway, whereby all communication from the outside world with the Boers was cut off, it seemed hopeless to make any attempt at active intervention in the Transvaal.

Failure of the Boer delegates in Europe and America.

No better illustration could be given of the change of feeling on the Continent than by the poor welcome given to the Boer delegates, Messrs. Wolmarans, Fischer and Wessels, in their tour to all the chief capitals.* On March 13, the day that Lord Roberts entered Bloemfontein, they had embarked at Lourenço Marques. After passing through Rome they arrived on April 15 at the Hague, where they were received by the Queen and her Foreign Minister, and announced their intention of going to the United States to obtain the restoration of peace. But they received cold comfort in the formal reception given them by the Secretary of State and President McKinley; while the American newspapers told them plainly that there was no hope of intervention. In Berlin and St. Petersburg they were refused any official reception. Even in France, where a generous feeling of sympathy for the Boers, as an oppressed nation, was perhaps stronger and more genuine than in any other country, although they were received by the President, they obtained no substantial assurances. The only piece of consolation which they got was that the International Peace Congress at Paris on October 1st and 2nd passed resolutions against the annexation of the two republics, but even this Congress toned down a resolution proposed by some of the English delegates, calling our conduct of the war a crime. So changed, indeed, had become the attitude of other nations to England, even after the first of Lord Roberts's successes, that on May 10 Lord Salisbury was able to speak of the careful and calm neutrality observed by all foreign governments.

What Lord Roberts had achieved during his period of command.

Thus, after a little over ten months of command in an area of territory three or four times as large as Great Britain and Ireland, Lord Roberts, though precipitate in stating that the war was at an end, could fairly have said that he had

* See chap. ii., p. 28.

brought the war to such a state that if England persisted her victory was absolutely assured. Such rapid success in a difficult country, almost barren of supplies, is due above all to the immense superiority which the command of the sea gives to a country like England. As long as she was determined to win, and could pour in men and animals and supplies of all kinds, not only from Great Britain, but from the whole of Europe, from America, from Asia, and Australia, there could be no real doubt as to the ultimate issue. For the readiness of the fleet not only kept the waterways open for England, but closed them almost entirely to the Boers, who were thus left chiefly to their own slender resources. The only danger that ever menaced the Empire was that the military commanders on the spot might be so slow in using the advantage which England's unbeaten fleet gave her, that the English people might become tired of the expense and length of the struggle and give it up prematurely. Lord Roberts had averted the possibility of this calamity. More even than his actual military achievements, his boldness and his magnificent rapidity had conquered the imagination of his countrymen and turned their dogged resistance against defeat into a determination to have complete victory, while on the field of war he had reversed the positions of invaders and invaded, and had begun to teach the Boers the lesson, so hard for them to learn, that the English were equally determined and more powerful than themselves.

Lord Roberts's greatness as a commander.

Whatever the resources of a nation, and however good its organisation, it can do nothing without men of an original and alert mind, able to adapt the machinery of organisation to meet the varying changes of circumstances, which occur in war more than in any other event in human life. Such a man had England found in Lord Roberts. At an age when most men feel that their life's work is done he plunged into an entirely novel form of campaign and, as if by a magician's wand, entirely changed its aspect. It is not that Lord Roberts was always right in his operations, or that he always fully estimated the problems before him, but he had the great merit of alertness in recognising mistakes and

a most glorious optimism which urged him forward and helped him to impose his will upon his adversaries. No man who had not led a temperate and energetic life, or who was not animated by the keenest patriotism and self-confidence, could have done or even have ventured to attempt what Lord Roberts accomplished. His chief fault was that found in all great commanders, of doing too much for himself. In a man of Lord Roberts's physique and driving power such a fault can easily be condoned. But though he trusted chiefly in himself, he never under-estimated the influence of personality in his officers. Those to whom Lord Roberts gave most responsibility may have made mistakes, but they were all men of spirit and dash, while those of whom he made little use, whatever may have been their other merits, generally lacked the magnetism or the enterprise essential for high command. In dealing with his men he showed truly Irish tact and sympathy, traits which have not always been a characteristic of great British commanders. This tact and sympathy did not show themselves in appeals to the passing emotions of the soldier, but in a far-sighted and constant care for their high character and for the grandeur of their calling. For instance, it would have occurred to few commanders as it did to Lord Roberts, when he himself was still in South Africa and his first troops were returning to England, to write home his nobly-worded letter to the newspapers in which he asked kind friends not to "tempt his gallant comrades" by excessive hospitality, but rather "to aid them to uphold the splendid reputation they have won for the Imperial Army." A man of Lord Roberts's high bearing, of his chivalry, his courtesy, and his alert originality does more for the British Army than any system modelled on a plan, however admirable, which is not moved by the living spirit.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTERS I–XIV

I

BRITISH COLUMNS.

For convenience of reference, the distribution into divisions and brigades of the British troops north of the Orange River during May and June is here set out.

THE MAIN ARMY.

Commander-in-Chief,

FIELD-MARSHAL RT. HON. LORD ROBERTS, V.C., K.P., ETC.

SEVENTH DIVISION.

G.O.C., LIEUT.-GENERAL C. TUCKER, C.B.

14th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. J. G. MAXWELL, D.S.O.

2nd Norfolk Regt.
2nd Lincoln Regt.
1st K. O. S. Borderers.
2nd Hampshire Regt.

Artillery.

18th, 62nd, and 75th R.F.A.
2 9·45 howitzers.
6 6-in. „

15th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. A. G. WAVELL.

2nd Cheshire Regt.
1st E. Lancashire Regt.
2nd S. Wales Borderers.
2nd N. Staffordshire Regt.

Mounted Troops.

1 Co. C.I.V.M.I.
Nesbitt's Horse.

Royal Engineers,—26th Co.

ELEVENTH DIVISION

G.O.C., LIEUT.-GENERAL R. POLE-CAREW, C.B.

1st (Guards') Brigade—Maj.-Gen. INIGO JONES.

3rd Grenadier Guards.
1st Coldstream „
2nd „ „
1st Scots „

18th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. T. E. STEPHENSON.

1st Essex Regt.
1st Yorkshire Regt.
2nd R. Warwickshire Regt.
1st Welsh Regt.

Artillery.

83rd, 84th, and 85th R.F.A.
2 Naval 4·7 guns.
2 Naval 12-pdrs.
2 5-in. siege guns.
Corps Troops, 7th and 12th Bns. I.Y.

Mounted Troops.

2nd W. Australian M.I.
Struben's Scouts.
Prince Alfred's Guard (detachment).

Royal Engineers,—12th Co.

CAVALRY DIVISION.

G.O.C., Lieut.-General J. D. P. French.

1st Cavalry Brigade.—Colonel T. C. Porter.

2nd Dragoons.
6th „
6th Dragoon Guards.
N. S. Wales Lancers.
Australian Horse.

Artillery.

"T" R.H.A.
"J" Section pom-poms.

3rd Cavalry Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. J. R. P. Gordon.

9th Lancers.
16th „
17th „

Artillery.

"R" R.H.A.
"D" Section pom-poms.

4th Cavalry Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. J. B. B. Dickson, C.B.

7th Dragoon Guards.
8th Hussars.
14th „

Artillery.

"O" R.H.A.
"E" Section pom-poms.

MOUNTED INFANTRY.

1st M.I. Brigade.—G.O.C., Maj.-General E. T. H. Hutton, C.B., A.D.C.

1st Corps M.I.—Lt.-Col. E. A. H. Alderson.

1st Canadian Mounted Rifles.
2nd „ „
1st Bn. M.I. (S. E., Cork, Aldershot and Southern Companies).

Artillery.

"G" R.H.A.
"C" Section pom-poms.

3rd Corps M.I.—Lt.-Col. T. D. Pilcher.

Queensland M.I.
New Zealand M.I.
3rd Bn. M.I. (Northumberland Fus., L. N. Lancs., Northern, K. O. Y. L.I., and Munster Fus. Companies).
New South Wales M.I. (from 2nd Corps M.I.).

*4th Corps M.I.**—Col. St. G. C. Henry.

S. Australian M.I.
Tasmanian M.I.
Victorian Mounted Rifles.
4th Bn. M.I. (D. of Cornwall's L.I., Shropshire L.I., Yorkshire L.I. and Warwick companies).

*8th Corps M.I.**—Lt.-Col. W. C. Ross.

Loch's Horse.
Lumsden's Horse.
8th Bn. M.I. (Cheshire, E. Lancs., S. W. Borderers, and N. Staffordshire companies).
1st W. Riding Co.
1st Oxford L.I. Co.

Artillery,—"J" R.H.A. and "L" Section pom-poms.

* The 4th and 8th Corps M.I. formed a separate command under Col. Henry.

WINBURG COLUMN.

G.O.C., Lieut.-General Ian Hamilton, C.B., D.S.O.

19th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. H. L. Smith-Dorrien, D.S.O.

1st Gordon Highrs.
2nd Duke of Cornwall's L.I.
2nd Shropshire L.I.
R. Canadian Regt.

Artillery.

74th, 76th, 81st, and 82nd R.F.A.
2 5-in. guns.

21st Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. Bruce Hamilton.

1st R. Sussex Regt.
1st Derbyshire Regt.
1st Cameron Highrs.
C.I.V. Regt.

Royal Engineers,—9th Co.

2nd Cavalry Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. R. G. Broadwood.

Composite Regiment of Household Cavalry (1st and 2nd Life Guards and R. Horse Guards).
10th Hussars.
12th Lancers.

Artillery.

"Q" R.H.A.
"K" Section pom-poms.

2nd Brigade M.I.—Brig.-Gen. C. P. Ridley.

2nd Corps M.I.—Lt.-Col. H. de B. De Lisle, D.S.O.

W. Australian M.I.
6th Bn. M.I. (Wilts, Gordons, Bedford, Essex and Welsh Companies).

5th Corps M.I.—Lt.-Col. H. L. Dawson.

Marshall's Horse.
Roberts's Horse.
Ceylon M.I.
5th Bn. M.I. (Worcester, R. Irish, E. Kent, Gloucester and E. Yorks Companies).

Artillery,—"P" R.H.A. and "A" Section pom-poms.

6th Corps M.I.—Lt.-Col. N. Legge, D.S.O.

Kitchener's Horse.
C.I.V. M.I.
2nd Bn. M.I. (Eastern, Western, Northern and Dublin Companies).
Derby M.I. (2 Cos.).

7th Corps M.I.—Lt.-Col. E. G. T. Bainbridge.

Burma M.I. (Durham L.I., Essex, and W. Riding Companies).
Rimington's Guides.
7th Bn. M.I. (Norfolk, Lincoln, Scottish Borderers, and Hampshire Companies).

NINTH DIVISION.

G.O.C., Lieut.-General Sir H. E. Colvile, K.C.M.G., C.B.

3rd (Highland) Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. H. A. MacDonald, C.B., D.S.O., A.D.C.

2nd Royal Highrs. (Black Watch).
1st Highland Light Infantry.
2nd Seaforth Highrs.
1st Argyll and Sutherland Highrs.

Artillery.

5th R.F.A.; 2 4·7 Naval guns.

Royal Engineers,—7th Co.

Mounted Troops.

1 sq. Eastern Province Horse.
13th Bn. I.Y.

RUNDLE'S COLUMN.

EIGHTH DIVISION.

G.O.C., Lieut.-General Sir H. M. L. Rundle, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

16th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. B. B. D. Campbell, M.V.O.

2nd Grenadier Guards.
2nd Scots Guards.
2nd E. Yorkshire Regt.
1st Leinster Regt.

Mounted Troops.

1st, 4th, and 11th Bns. I.Y.

Royal Engineers,—5th Co.

17th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. J. E. Boyes.

1st Worcester Regt.
2nd R. W. Kent Regt.
1st S. Staffordshire Regt.
2nd Manchester Regt.

Artillery.

2nd, 77th, and 79th R.F.A.

COLONIAL DIVISION.

G.O.C., Major-General E. Y. Brabant, C.M.G.

Cape Mounted Rifles.
Kaffrarian Rifles.
Driscoll's Scouts.
1st and 2nd Brabant's Horse.
Border Horse.
Frontier Mounted Rifles.
Queenstown Volunteers.

Artillery.

2 Naval 12-pdrs.
4 15-pdrs. (Cape Artillery).
4 2·5 R.M.L.
1 14-pdr. Hotchkiss.

SIXTH DIVISION.

G.O.C., Lieut.-General T. Kelly-Kenny, C.B.

12th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. R. A. P. Clements, D.S.O., A.D.C.

2nd Bedfordshire Regt.
1st Royal Irish Regt.
2nd Worcester Regt.
2nd Wiltshire Regt.

Mounted Troops.

Prince Alfred's Guard.
Malta M.I.

Royal Engineers,—38th Co.

13th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. C. E. Knox.

2nd E. Kent Regt.
2nd Gloucestershire Regt.
1st W. Riding Regt.
1st Oxfordshire L.I.

Artillery.

8th and 68th R.F.A.
C.I.V. Bty. (later transferred to General Paget).

THIRD DIVISION.

G.O.C., Lieut.-General Sir H. C. Chermside, G.C.M.G., C.B.

22nd Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. R. E. Allen.

2nd Northumberland Fus.
3rd E. Kent Regt.
2nd R. Berkshire Regt.
4th Argyll and Sutherland Highrs.

Mounted Troops.

Montmorency's Scouts.
1st and 2nd Cos. R. Scots M.I.
Northumberland Fus. Co. M.I.
1st and 2nd Cos. Derbyshire Regt. M.I.
1st and 2nd Cos. R. Berks Regt. M.I.
R. Irish Rifles Co. M.I.

23rd Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. W. G. Knox, C.B.

1st R. Scots.
1st Suffolk Regt.
3rd R. Scots.
9th King's Royal Rifle Corps.

Artillery.

9th, 17th, and 39th R.F.A.
Elswick Vol. Bty.

Royal Engineers,—47th Co.

METHUEN'S COLUMN.

FIRST DIVISION.

G.O.C., Lieut.-General Lord Methuen, K.C.V.O., C.B., C.M.G.

9th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. C. W. H. Douglas, A.D.C.

1st Northumberland Fus.
1st L. N. Lancashire Regt.
3rd S. Wales Borderers.
2nd Northampton Regt.

Artillery.

4th, 20th, and 38th R.F.A.
37th Howitzer Bat. R.F.A.
"H" Section pom-poms.
Diamond Fields Artillery.
23rd Co. (Western) R.G.A.

20th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. A. H. Paget.

1st R. Munster Fus.
2nd K. O. Yorkshire L.I.
4th Scottish Rifles.
4th S. Staffordshire Regt.

Mounted Troops.

3rd, 5th, 10th, and 15th Bns. I.Y.
Warwick's Scouts.

Royal Engineers,—11th Co.

HUNTER'S COLUMN.

TENTH DIVISION.

G.O.C., Lieut.-General Sir A. Hunter, K.C.B., D.S.O.

5th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. A. F. Hart, C.B.

2nd Somerset L.I.
1st Connaught Rangers.
2nd R. Dublin Fus.
1st Border Regt.

Mounted Troops.

6th Bn. I.Y.

Royal Engineers,—24th Co.

6th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. G. Barton, C.B.

2nd Royal Fus.
2nd R. Scots Fus.
1st R. Welsh Fus.
2nd R. Irish Fus.

Artillery.

"M" R.H.A. (one section).
"G" Section pom-poms.
28th, 66th, and 78th R.F.A.
1 6-in. q.-f. gun.

WARREN'S COLUMN.

G.O.C., Lieut.-General Sir Charles Warren, G.C.M.G., K.C.B.

Mounted Troops.

8th Bn. I.Y.
19th Bn. (Paget's Horse) I.Y.
Munster Fus. M.I. (1 Co.).
Cape Mounted Police (30).
Warren's Scouts (30).

Infantry.

Duke of Edinburgh's Own Vol. Rifles (7 Cos.).

Artillery.

"E" Bat. R. Canadian Artillery (4 guns).
Royal Cape Artillery (2 guns).

MAFEKING RELIEF COLUMN.

G.O.C., Colonel B. T. Mahon, D.S.O.

Imperial Light Horse.
Kimberley Mounted Corps.
100 men Fusilier Brigade.
4 guns, "M" R.H.A.
"F" Section pom-poms.

PLUMER'S COLUMN.

G.O.C., Lieut.-Colonel H. C. O. Plumer.

Rhodesian Regiment.
S. Rhodesian Volunteers (800).
British South Africa Police (1,000).
3 2·5-in. guns, 1 12½-pdr. Vickers-Maxim, 2 7-pdrs., 8 Gatlings and Maxims.

MAFEKING DEFENCE FORCE.

COMMANDANT, COLONEL R. S. S. BADEN-POWELL.

Protectorate Regt.
British South Africa Police (Detachment).
Cape Police "
Bechuanaland Rifles "
Town Guard.

Artillery.

4 7-pdr. M. L. guns.
1 1-pdr. Hotchkiss.
7 ·303 Maxims.
1 2-in. Nordenfelts.

RHODESIAN FIELD FORCE.

G.O.C., LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR F. CARRINGTON, K.C.B., K.C.M.G.

1st Brigade—Col. G. A. L. CAREW, D.S.O.

1st Regt. :—
N. S. Wales Bushmen.

2nd Regt. :—
S. Australian Bushmen.
Tasmanian Bushmen.
Queensland M.I.

3rd Regt. :—
Victorian Bushmen.
W. Australian Bushmen.

Not Brigaded :—
17th and 18th Bns. I.Y.
Victorian Imperial Bushmen.

2nd Brigade.—Col. RALEIGH GREY, C.M.G.

4th Regt. :—
New Zealand Bushmen.

5th Regt. :—
New Zealand Imperial Bushmen.

6th Regt. :—
N.S.W. Imperial Bushmen.

Artillery.

"C" Bat. R. Canadian Artillery.
1st ("New Zealand") Bat., Armstrong q.-f. 15-pdrs.
2nd Bat., Armstrong q.-f. 15-pdrs.
3rd Bat. (2 guns).
2 pom-pom batteries.

THE NATAL ARMY.

G.O.C., GENERAL RT. HON. SIR REDVERS BULLER, V.C., G.C.B., K.C.M.G.

SECOND DIVISION.

LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR C. F. CLERY, K.C.B.

2nd Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. E. O. F. HAMILTON.

2nd R. W. Surrey Regt.
2nd Devonshire Regt.
2nd E. Surrey Regt.
2nd W. Yorkshire Regt.

4th Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. C. D. COOPER.

1st Durham L.I.
2nd Cameronians (Scottish Rifles).
3rd King's Royal Rifles.
1st Rifle Brigade.

Artillery.

7th, 63rd and 64th R.F.A.

Royal Engineers,—17th Co.

4 Naval 12-pdrs.
2 ,, 4·7.
2 pom-poms.

FOURTH DIVISION.

G.O.C., Lieut.-General The Hon. N. G. Lyttelton, C.B.

7th Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. F. W. Kitchener.

1st Devonshire Regt.
1st Manchester Regt.
2nd Gordon Highrs.
2nd Rifle Brigade.

Artillery.

21st, 42nd and 53rd R.F.A.
2 Naval 12-pdrs.

8th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. F. Howard, C.B., C.M.G., A.D.C.

1st Liverpool Regt.
1st Leicestershire Regt.
1st R. Inniskilling Fus.
1st King's Royal Rifles.

Royal Engineers,—23rd Co.

FIFTH DIVISION.

Lieut.-General H. J. T. Hildyard, C.B.

10th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. J. Talbot Coke.

2nd Dorsetshire Regt.
2nd Middlesex Regt.
1st R. Dublin Fusiliers.

Royal Engineers,—37th Co.

11th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. A. S. Wynne, C.B.

2nd R. Lancaster Regt.
1st S. Lancashire Regt.
1st York and Lancaster Regt.
2nd Lancashire Fus.

Artillery.

13th, 67th, and 69th R.F.A.

NATAL CAVALRY.

1st Cavalry Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. J. F. Burn-Murdoch.

1st Royal Dragoons.
5th Dragoon Guards.
13th Hussars.

2nd Cavalry Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. J. F. Brocklehurst, M.V.O.

5th Lancers.
18th Hussars.
19th Hussars.

Artillery.

"A" Bat. R.H.A.
Colt Gun Detachment.
Natal (Volunteer) Field Artillery (2 guns).

3rd Mounted Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. The Earl of Dundonald, C.B., M.V.O.

South African Light Horse.
Thorneycroft's M.I.
Bethune's M.I.
Composite Regt. M.I.
Strathcona's Horse (joined June 20th).
Natal Carbineers.
Natal Mounted Rifles.
Border ,, ,,
Umvoti ,, ,,

CORPS ARTILLERY.

4th Mountain Bat.
10th „ „ (Detachment).
16th Co. S. Div. R. Gar. Artillery.
61st and 86th Howitzer R.F.A.

10th Co. E. Div. R. Gar. Artillery.
2nd „ W. „ „
6th „ W. „ „

II

TABLE SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE IMPERIAL YEOMANRY INTO BATTALIONS AND COMPANIES.

1st Battalion.—Lieut.-Col. R. G. W. Chaloner.

1st Wiltshire Co.
2nd „ „
3rd Gloucestershire Co.
4th Glamorganshire Co.

2nd Battalion.—Lieut.-Col. M. A. Burke.

5th Warwickshire Co.
21st Cheshire Co.
22nd „ „
32nd Lancashire Co.

3rd Battalion.—Lieut.-Col. G. J. Younghusband.

9th Yorkshire Co.
10th Notts. (Sherwood Rangers) Co.
11th Yorkshire Co.
12th S. Nottinghamshire Co.

4th Battalion.—Col. F. G. Blair.

6th Staffordshire Co.
7th Leicestershire Co.
8th Derbyshire Co.
41st Hampshire Co

5th Battalion.—Lieut.-Col. F. C. Meyrick.

13th Shropshire Co.
14th Northumberland Co.
15th „ „
16th Worcestershire Co.

6th Battalion.—Lieut.-Col. C. R Burn.

17th Ayrshire and Lanarkshire Co.
18th Glasgow (Queen's Own) Co.
19th Lothians and Berwickshire Co.
20th Fife and Forfarshire Light Horse Co.

7th Battalion.—Col. Helyar.

25th West Somerset Co.
26th Dorsetshire Co.
27th Devonshire Co.
48th North Somerset Co.

8th Battalion.—Lieut.-Col. A. P. Crawley.

23rd Lancashire Co.
24th Westmoreland and Cumberland Co.
77th Manchester Co.

9th Battalion.—Col. H. R. L. Howard.

29th Denbighshire Co.
30th Pembrokeshire Co.
31st Montgomeryshire Co.
49th „ „

10th Battalion.—Lieut.-Col. Eric Smith.

37th Buckinghamshire Co.
38th „
39th Berkshire Co.
40th Oxfordshire Co.

11*th Battalion.*—Colonel W. K. Mitford.

33rd East Kent Co.
34th Middlesex Co.
35th ,,
36th West Kent Co.

12*th Battalion.*—Lieut.-Col. R. H. F. W. Wilson.

28th Bedfordshire Co.
42nd Hertfordshire Co.
43rd Suffolk Co.
44th ,,

13*th Battalion.*—Lieut.-Col. B. E. Spragge, D.S.O.

45th Dublin Co.
46th Belfast Co.
47th D.C.O. Co.
54th Belfast Co.

14*th Battalion.*—Colonel A. M. Brookfield.

53rd East Kent Co.
55th Northumberland Co.
62nd Middlesex Co.
69th Sussex Co.

15*th Battalion.*—Lieut.-Col. L. Sandwith.

56th Buckinghamshire Co.
57th ,,
58th Berkshire Co.
59th Oxfordshire Co.

16*th Battalion.*—Lieut.-Col. H. M. Ridley.

63rd Wiltshire Co.
66th Yorkshire Co.
74th Dublin Co.

17*th Battalion.*—Lieut.-Col. R. St. L. Moore.

50th Hampshire Co.
60th N. Irish (Belfast) Co.
61st S. Irish (Dublin) Co.
65th Leicestershire Co.

18*th Battalion.*—Colonel R. K. Parke.

67th Sharpshooters Co.
70th ,,
71st ,,
75th ,,

19*th Battalion.*—Colonel H. Paget, C.B.

51st Paget's Co.
52nd ,,
68th ,,
73rd ,,

20*th Battalion.*—Lieut.-Col. R. B. Colvin.

72nd Roughriders Co.
76th ,,
78th Co.
79th Co.

III

BOER COMMANDOS.

A list is here given of the Boer commandos. The numbers assigned to the commandos are those given by Captain Reichmann, the United States attaché with the Boer forces, and represent the numbers of men "registered for the field" at the beginning of the war. These numbers naturally changed from time to time, but they are useful as giving an indication of the relative sizes of the commandos. Wherever possible, the commandants are also given. In some cases, the names of several successive commandants of a commando are given.

TRANSVAAL.

Commando	Commandant.	Numbers.
Krugersdorp	J. Kemp	1,317
Johannesburg	B. Viljoen, C. Pienaar, W. J. Viljoen	2,013
Germiston	Gravett	
Boksburg	Dirksen	
Middelburg	Fourie	1,550
Rustenburg	Steenekamp	2,103
Ermelo	J. N. H. Grobler	963
Piet Retief	..	301
Wakkerstroom	J. J. Alberts	1,179
Pretoria	D. Erasmus	2,832
Waterberg	Grobler	284
Zoutpansberg	H. Snyman	1,017
Bethal	H. S. Grobler	737
Bloemhof	Tollie de Beer	680
Carolina	D. Joubert	427
Heidelberg	Weilbach, Buys	2,375
Lichtenburg	Celliers	993
Lydenburg	Schalk Burger, D. J. Schoeman	1,125
Marico	J. P. Snyman	984
Potchefstroom	A. P. J. Cronje, Liebenberg	1,249
Standerton	J. J. Alberts	890
Swaziland	Oppermann	271
Utrecht	..	492
Vryheid	..	731
Wolmaransstad	S. B. Du Toit	838
		25,411

To these must be added the "Zarps," of whom the mounted and foot police together numbered about 1,400; also the foreign volunteers, whose organisation and commanders were constantly changing.

Orange Free State.

Commando.	Commandant.	Numbers.
Bloemfontein	Du Plooy Piet Fourie Kolbe	1,253
Winburg	Vilonel Van der Merwe Haasbroek	1,616
Senekal	de Villiers	
Kroonstad	Nel F. van Aardt	2,068
Ladybrand	Crowther Ferreira	749
Ficksburg	P. de Villiers	235
Bethlehem	Michael Prinsloo	1,142
Fauresmith	Visser	988
Harrismith	C. J. de Villiers	751
Heilbron	L. Steenekamp	1,857
Vrede	H. Botha	1,038
Boshof	Badenhorst	780
Rouxville Thaba 'Nchu	J. H. Olivier	528 98
Hoopstad	..	494
Smithfield	Swanepoel Potgieter	299
Bethulie	du Plooy	337
Wepener.	T. Roux	253
Philippolis	Judge Hertzog	209
Jacobsdal	H. P. J. Pretorius	139
		14,834

CHAPTER XV

THE END OF THE SIEGE OF LADYSMITH

After Jan. 6 relaxation of Boer activity.

AFTER the great assault on January 6 the Boers appeared to have relinquished all immediate hope of reducing Ladysmith by active measures. The energy of the bombardment and the persistence of the snipers relaxed. Several guns and portions of the investing commandos were withdrawn to oppose the relief column, and just sufficient shells were fired into Ladysmith to keep the garrison alive to the relative positions of the opposing forces. Not that this external evidence was necessary to remind the garrison of its existing state. Ever since the failure of the relief force at Colenso, the shadow of famine and epidemic sickness was perceptible.

The food supply of Ladysmith.

When, on November 2, Ladysmith was finally invested, the garrison approximated 21,000. Of this number, 13,496 were effective combatants. During the first weeks of the investment, enough food was procurable in the town for the majority of the civilian population, white and coloured, without drawing upon the military resources. But ultimately the entire population became dependent for its daily food upon Colonel Ward.* This officer, who, with his able subordinates of the Army Service Corps, Colonel Stoneman, Major H. G. Morgan, and Captain Long, had strained every effort to furnish Ladysmith as an advanced base, was prepared against every emergency. These officers had realised the difficulties which would arise if the investment should be protracted, and had requisitioned all the staple food material in the town, other than that in private houses.† As a result

* A.A.G. (B) for Supplies.

† The food material in hand on November 1 was as follows:—Flour, 979,996 lb.; preserved meat, 173,792 lb.; biscuits, 142,510 lb.· tea,

of this requisition, Colonel Ward was able to collect 1,700 slaughter cattle, 14,000 tins of condensed milk, many hundred thousand pounds of mealies, and the entire grocery stocks in the town. Over and above the slaughter cattle there were, within the perimeter, 16,000 draught oxen, 5,500 horses, and 4,500 mules. It was estimated that the stock in hand with care would furnish the garrison and civilian population with full rations * for two and a half months. Intombi Camp added considerable complications in the question of supply, and as the private stocks upon which the majority of the civilians had subsisted became exhausted, in the same ratio the strain upon the central supply depôt increased, until during the later phases of the defence the daily ration-list was: 16,000 Europeans (including 750 Cape boys), 2,440 Kaffirs (1,590 of whom were in Government employ), and 2,470 natives of India. The 16,000 Europeans included about 150 children under twelve years.

The spread of sickness.

But, although it was possible to control the ration difficulties by a judicious system of economical distribution, yet the problem which became uppermost in the minds of the Staff was how to deal with the spread of sickness. Even before the war Ladysmith had not possessed a reputation for salubrity. Since its establishment as a garrison town enteric fever had made its appearance in a virulent form, and during the year preceding the war became epidemic, in consequence of which the troops were removed for a considerable period

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23,167 lb.; coffee, 9,483 lb.; sugar, 267,699 lb.; salt, 38,741 lb.; maize, 3,965,400 lb.; bran, 923,948 lb.; oats, 1,270,570 lb.; hay, etc., 1,864,223 lb.; some stocks of wine, spirits and medical comforts. In addition, the Indian contingent had some food material necessary for its native followers. By requisition the general stock was increased by:—Cattle, 1,511; goats and sheep, 1,092; mealies, 1,517,996 lb.; Kaffir millet, 68,370 lb.; Boer wheat meal, 108,739 lb. All medical comforts, preserved milk, and wine and spirits, were also taken over at a fair price, an influential member of the local community assisting in the work of valuation.

* The ration issued until November 17 was:—Bread, 1¼ lb., or biscuit 1 lb.; meat (fresh), 1¼ lb., or preserved, 1 lb.; coffee, 1 oz., or tea ½ oz.; sugar, 3 oz.; salt, ½ oz.; pepper, 1·36 oz.; vegetables (compressed), 1 oz., or potatoes ½ lb.; occasional issues of jam, cheese, or bacon in addition to the above.

to Mooi River. Consequently, when the pinch of investment made itself felt in Ladysmith, and the vital resistance of the troops began to deteriorate through confinement and insufficient feeding, bodily ailments rapidly increased and soon spread to an alarming degree. The confinement of so large a body of men and animals within a circumscribed area could not fail to supply a fertile bed for the development of a disease which had previously impregnated the town. Towards the end of December enteric took an alarming hold on the garrison, and the cases of dysentery also showed that the indifferent feeding, more especially the lack of vegetables, was breaking down the more feeble constitutions. During the last week in November there were 15 cases of enteric and 72 of dysentery in hospital. Exactly one month later the number of enteric cases had risen to 441 and of dysentery cases to 361. The death-rate for the last week in December was 23, against 5 during the same period in the preceding month; and during the month of January this proportion increased each week until at one period, in Intombi Camp and Ladysmith, there were no less than 1,900 lying-down patients in hospital. The medical returns show that during the siege, out of a total garrison of 13,497 men, there were no less than 10,673 admissions. This total, of course, includes many cases that were readmitted twice or even more often; but, even so, it is a conclusive indication of the state of physical debility to which the garrison was ultimately reduced and of the stress which was placed upon the organisation of the medical staff in Ladysmith.

Hospital arrangements.

To appreciate the anxiety which must ever have been present with Sir George White and his staff with regard to this spread of sickness, it is necessary to make a brief study of the hospital arrangements in Ladysmith and Intombi Camp and of the nature of the *personnel*, plant, appliances, and resources at Sir George White's command. The P.M.O. was Lieutenant-Colonel Exham, with Major Bateson, R.A.M.C., as his secretary. The original plan of campaign had never intended that Ladysmith should possess anything beyond a stationary hospital. Thus when the town became invested, it was only equipped with the hospital appliances with which

Sir George White's force had taken the field. Even of these part had been abandoned at Dundee.

Buildings, etc., utilised.

At the commencement of the siege the Town Hall, the Dutch Reformed Church, School House, and a portion of the Convent were utilised as hospitals.* But, as was shown in the preceding volume, the exposure of these buildings to accidental bombardment made the Intombi Camp necessary. A nominal armistice of twenty-four hours' duration was allowed to the garrison to establish this camp. Consequently not only had the arrangements to be made for the 300 sick and wounded then in Ladysmith to be moved to Intombi, a distance of over three miles, but in a great measure hospital equipment as well had to be improvised within the twenty-four hours agreed upon. With the aid of Colonel Stoneman, whose agents requisitioned mattresses and bedding from private houses in the town, a camp was pitched which was capable of receiving the medical staff and 300 patients. Besides these numbers, and, of course, separate from the medical department, the Army Service Corps provided for the lodgment of 1,200 non-combatants, European and native, who sought the protection of the neutral camp.†

Intombi hospital.

During the early stages of the investment the hospital organisation at Intombi was adequate. All medical con-

* The School House, and a Protestant church were used for sick and wounded officers, and the stationary hospital was brought in from Tin Camp. The Dutch Reformed Church was utilised for Boer wounded.

† The *personnel* of this improvised hospital camp consisted of No. 12 Field Hospital (Major Love, R.A.M.C.), with 45 officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the Royal Army Medical Corps; half of No. 26 British Indian Field Hospital (Major Kerin, R.A.M.C.), 2 officers R.A.M.C., 4 assistant surgeons, and a native establishment of 86 attendants, of whom 56 were dhoolie bearers. No. 1 Stationary Hospital of the Natal Field Force (Major Bruce, R.A.M.C.), 6 civil practitioners, 52 non-commissioned officers and men of the Royal Army Medical Corps, and a part of No. 1 Natal Volunteer Field Force Hospital (Captain Currie, Natal Carbineers), 3 medical officers, and 18 non-commissioned officers and men of the Volunteer Medical Service. No. 12 Field Hospital was complete with 100 beds, No. 26 had 50 beds, No. 1 Stationary Hospital 80 beds, and the Volunteer Hospital 70 beds, making the total of 300. The whole was placed under the administration of Major R. W. Mapleton, R.A.M.C. The authority in the civilian portion of the camp being vested with Mr. Bennett, Resident Magistrate of Ladysmith.

trivances necessary for health and sanitation that were possible in the circumstances were bought or improvised. At the same time it was necessary to maintain a central hospital in the town itself for the purpose of collecting and forwarding patients and for housing temporary cases. Thus the Town Hall remained a hospital throughout the investment. But although the Intombi Hospital was a satisfactory makeshift during the first few weeks of investment, yet when dysentery and enteric became epidemic the strain upon both the medical and supply organisation was so great that the condition of the patients became, in the opinion of the Court of Inquiry which was subsequently held, "far from satisfactory." There may have been grave fault in the original distribution of the hospitals, but the best organisation and supervision in the world could not have alleviated the suffering of enteric patients, when proper diet was not procurable; nor could the best care and attention give strength to the weak and convalescent when the force of adverse circumstances denied them the essential nourishment and the surroundings of a sanatorium. When it is realised that in less than three months a hospital which was organised for 300 patients had to increase its capacity to receive over 1,900; that the trained staff, which at the beginning was below the war establishment of a General Hospital, received little addition to its numbers, it can be understood that Intombi Camp was not an ideal service hospital.

Garrison cheered by their success of Jan. 6.

But even the sufferings of the sick and the mental and physical strain of investment could not rapidly efface the confidence felt by the garrison, as a whole, over their successful action on January 6. Moreover, it was understood that Buller was completing his arrangements for a second advance. Knowing that he had been reinforced, and feeling that he would have profited by his failure at Colenso, the garrison watched for his second attempt without misgiving.

Jan. 12–28. They await news of Buller.

On January 12, at 3 in the afternoon, a British heliograph twinkled from the summit of Swaartz Kop, near Potgieter's Drift on the Upper Tugela, 15 miles west-south-west of Ladysmith. This communication gave indirect evidence of Buller's intentions. Later the sound of artillery and the

appearance of reinforcing Boers as they concentrated upon Spion Kop furnished evidence more direct. But although from January 12 to 18 there was continuous fighting in the vicinity of Potgieter's and Trichardt's Drifts, yet Sir G. White and his garrison remained in complete ignorance of the issue. But to be prepared against sudden favourable developments, the flying column was reconstituted, and arrangements made to receive a large force arriving with a certain proportion of wounded. On January 17 the garrison believed that relief was at hand. From the earliest daylight there had been heavy firing in the direction of Potgieter's. The signallers from Swaartz Kop reported that Warren's force had crossed the Tugela and turned the Boers out of Tabanyama, and later came the cheering notification of Dundonald's success at Acton Homes. Thus informed, the garrison counted the hours to its relief. But all hopes were rudely shattered.

They do not receive the news of Spion Kop till Jan. 27.

January 24 was a day of acute anticipation in Ladysmith. A more comprehensive message had been received from the south, explaining the nature of the attack in progress. Great issues were at stake in the occupation of Spion Kop. The sounds of artillery continued unabated for hours. The bombardment was incessant, and about half-past 4 in the afternoon it seemed to reach a climax. From Ladysmith, the reverse of the eastern extremity of the Spion Kop ridge and the two conical peaks known as "the breasts" are visible. When the firing reached its zenith, Spion Kop for a period was wreathed in a cloud of bursting shrapnel. Late that evening, the welcome news was circulated that a brief message had been received to the effect that Buller had taken Spion Kop. For two whole days this was all the information that the garrison had. The morning following the night on which Spion Kop was abandoned broke with a heavy and overcast sky. Such weather destroyed all visual communication for the garrison. From the defences, however, it was possible, later in the day, to make out considerable movement amongst the Boers. There was every indication that the issue of Buller's attack had been successful. A black mass on the slope of a far hill proved to be a large herd of cattle being driven up the road which leads to Van Reenen's Pass—long

strings of white tilted wagons were slowly crawling northwards away from the laagers—ambulances were loitering over the plain as if in search of wounded. Figures could be discerned on the summit of Spion Kop, working as it appeared at intrenchments. The garrison had yet to learn that these workers were engaged in the sad task of burying the British dead. At the time the view of the retreating laagers confirmed the message of overnight, and the plain was anxiously scanned for the first view of the relief force.

The garrison receive the news with resignation.

The sky remained clouded until evening, and night fell upon the garrison, torn with conflicting emotions. Nor was the anxiety allayed on the following morning, when it was seen that the Boer wagons were returning to the camps which on the previous day they had evacuated. Again there was no sun and the garrison had perforce to wait with patience the solving of the Spion Kop riddle, long after the amazing truth was common property throughout the world. About mid-day, on January 27, a gleam of sunshine allowed the passage of a heliogram from the south. Then the garrison learned the truth. The news rapidly circulated through the force. After the tension of the preceding seventy-two hours it might have been anticipated that this intelligence would be received with a feeling of despondency worse than anything that had been hitherto experienced. It was not so. It may be said with fairness that the garrison accepted the news, which meant for it a prolongation of real hardship, with resignation. In spite of the serious check which the relief column had again sustained, cheering messages were flashed to the hill-locked garrison north of the Tugela. A Pietermaritzburg newspaper was brought into the town by a native runner, which reported Sir Redvers Buller's speech to his troops.* Also, on the 28th Sir G. White received a message from Lord Roberts, which, added to the sanguine passages in Buller's speech, helped to keep up the spirits of the garrison.

From this date the real rigour of the investment

Although, as a whole, the garrison accepted Buller's second failure with equanimity, yet it was from this date onward that the real rigour of the investment began. The

* Vol. iii., p. 309.

begins; sickness spreads and food becomes insufficient.

scourge of sickness had reached alarming proportions. Over and above the crowd of wounded which January 6 had brought to strain the medical resources, the week which saw the Spion Kop failure found the garrison with 842 enteric and 472 cases of dysentery in hospital. Owing to the impossibility of giving proper nourishment to the patients the death-rate had increased far above the normal ratio.* But there were still 12,000 men to man the defences, and the question uppermost in Sir G. White's mind, was not so much how to spare the sick, but to husband his resources adequately to sustain the robust. Whatever clinging hope Sir George might have entertained that he would be able to re-establish the character of his force as a field army and co-operate with the relief force had now to be abandoned. Hay was exhausted, and the cavalry and artillery horses had practically eaten out the supply of hard food. The little that remained was judiciously issued to keep a few guns horsed and to augment the supply of farinaceous food for the garrison. Therefore, with the exception of fifty horses per regiment and one brigade division, the horses were turned loose to fend for themselves, in the hope that they might eke out an existence by grazing within the perimeter. To supplement the reduced corn ration which remained for issue to the animals still in work, Major Wickham, of the Indian Commissariat, organised a corps of native Indian grass-cutters. These men made excursions by day and night to the confines of the perimeter to cut grass for the animals. It now became expedient to supplement the fresh meat ration with horseflesh. The better conditioned of the recently emancipated troop-horses were requisitioned. Some had already made their way to the enemy's lines; those that remained by degrees came under the butcher's knife. From this period until the end of the siege, on an average, sixty horses were slaughtered daily for distribution as rations. Considerable ingenuity was displayed by Lieu-

* It included Mr. G. W. Steevens, the talented war correspondent of the *Daily Mail*. Mr. Steevens and his *confrères* had done much to cheer the spirits of the garrison by publishing a small humorous news-sheet called the *Ladysmith Lyre*. Four numbers were printed.

tenant McNalty, A.S.C., Captain Young, R.E., and their assistant, Mr. Turner, in issuing horsemeat in a palatable form. It was converted into a paste called chevril, which made a nourishing soup. Sausages and forced meats were also made, and jellies and extracts were manufactured for use in the hospitals.

Water supply and bakeries.

From the beginning of the investment, when the Boers had tampered with the water supply, a system of filtration had been adopted and placed in the charge of Lieutenant Abadie, 11th Hussars. Subsequently Mr. Binnie, a civil engineer in the service of the Natal Government, and Engineer C. C. Sheen, R.N., of H.M.S. *Powerful*, put their heads together and created, out of railway material, three condensers, with the result that as long as the coal lasted it was possible to supply the garrison daily with 12,000 gallons of condensed or filtered water. In Intombi Camp also efficient means were employed to purify the drinking water by sinking barrels in the sand of the river. The Indian Contingent had brought its field bakeries with it. Some portion of these had been abandoned at Dundee, and served to bake bread for the Boer commandos; but the balance, in conjunction with such bakeries as existed in Ladysmith and with others that were improvised under the control of the Army Service Corps, were able to supply the garrison with white bread as long as the flour lasted. When this became exhausted, except for the small quantities reserved for Intombi, bread was baked from several varieties of locally-obtained meal. Maize bread was attempted, the necessary gluten being supplied by Colman's starch and other makeshifts.

Milk supply and vegetables.

When matters were at their worst in Intombi Camp, it became necessary to requisition the entire milk supply in the town. All animals in milk were registered, and a dairy farm was attempted. The responsibility for this farm rested with Captain Thompson, Indian Commissariat. Fresh milk at this period was in such demand that it was only by employing the utmost vigilance that the authorities were able to prevent its surreptitious consumption. Although in many cases the requisitioning of milk from private owners constituted a considerable hardship upon women and children,

yet the great strain upon the hospital made imperative the most stringent measures. In the best of circumstances, enteric patients were being fed upon a stock fluid made from rice or barley flour, baked flour and milk, the milk ration being generally below three-quarters of a pint per day for each patient, however dangerously ill. Very considerable service was done to the garrison by the horticultural diligence of the Indian inhabitants. These men raised a large crop of seasonable vegetables, which they sold at great profit to themselves and benefit to the general health of the troops. The peach crop also came as a great boon when the garrison was first feeling the strain of a diet in which flesh so greatly predominated; and even though quantities of these peaches were devoured before they were ripe, yet they proved a deterrent to scurvy, a scourge which had made its appearance as soon as the supply of lime-juice was exhausted.

By the end of February the whole population on army rations.

Towards the end of February the whole of the civilian population had come upon the Army Service Corps ration list, and the distribution of their supplies was placed in the hands of a locally-formed administration, of which Mr. Farquhar, the Mayor, was the titular head. On the whole the arrangement worked satisfactorily. But the circumstances of investment by this time had so jarred upon the feelings of those hitherto unacquainted with military control, that it was impossible to avoid friction in some form or other. But whatever may have been the faults of the civilians in Ladysmith, however much they may have chafed at military restrictions, they cannot be accused of any disposition other than loyally to maintain the defence of their little township.

Organisation of the Town Guard and strengthening of the defences.

The Town Guard, a handful of civilian loyalists, in December had been reorganised and placed under the command of Major Molyneux, Adjutant of the Natal Defence Force. Subsequently, this civilian guard was augmented by a corps of 900 men, enlisted from the ranks of the railway employés and transport riders who were idling in the town. All convalescents who could walk at all were brought in from Intombi and armed. They were lodged in a goods-shed and provided with Indian cooks. They were kept as

a final reserve in event of extreme emergency. Efforts were made to profit by the experience bought during the attack of January 6. Cæsar's Camp and Wagon Hill were placed in a more thorough state of defence. The Rifle Brigade, which had been transferred from Observation Post to Wagon Hill, in four days made the latter post one of extraordinary strength. Colonel Knox had also converted Devon Post into a permanent work of great strength. The deficiencies which sickness and casualty had made in the firing line of the defences were to some extent made good by arming the dismounted cavalry with Lee-Enfields and sending them into the trenches. As only two batteries were now horsed, the remaining guns were distributed along the perimeter.

The Boers reduce their numbers round Ladysmith, but attempt to flood the town.

Although the garrison was constantly informed that an assault was again in preparation, yet in reality nothing was further from the minds of the Boers. The activity of the Relief Force south of the Tugela occupied the whole attention of the Boer leaders, and demanded the massing of every available rifle south of Ladysmith. So far was the thought of carrying Ladysmith by a second assault absent from the minds of the Boers, that in January-February the investing force at Ladysmith was reduced to the barest limit necessary to preserve the cordon, and rarely exceeded 5,000 men, some authorities even placing it as low as 3,500.* In reality, the Boers had other designs upon Ladysmith. It had been suggested to the Commandant-General that the reduction of the garrison could possibly be brought about without further bloodshed by the damming of the Klip River below Ladysmith. A survey was consequently carried out by a Captain Halder and a Mr. Schmitz-Dumont. They recommended the raising of a 30 ft. dam at a point where the Klip passes through the Bulwana Gorge, and estimated that a barrage here would flood the Ladysmith plain to such a degree as to render communication between Ladysmith and Intombi impossible, and prevent any sortie or operations against Bulwana; also that the town would be partially flooded, and, as a subsidiary advantage, in the event of an abandon-

* Commandant Runck's narrative of the Boer war.

ment of the Tugela positions by the Boers, the sudden destruction of the dam would impede the advance of the relief force from the south. A contractor was readily found, and the work on the dam began. A tramway extension was made to join the Bulwana-Colenso section of the railway, and large gangs of Kaffirs were employed in the construction of the barrage, which took the form of a sandbag *bund*. These engineering operations were undertaken in full view of Cæsar's Camp, and for a considerable period puzzled the garrison. A 12-pounder naval gun was brought to bear on the labourers, but, although it was possible to impede the work during the day, the construction proceeded apace by night. But in spite of the estimate that it would only take four weeks to complete the work, the "Ladysmith dam" was never completed. During all this period the Boers still continued to worry Ladysmith with a desultory shell fire. Two 6-inch guns, some howitzers, and field guns were in action every day against the town and defences. Certain casualties occurred from the fire, but for the most part it was ineffective beyond the occasional destruction of buildings.

The garrison again disappointed of relief, but keep up their spirits.

During the first week of February, the garrison had evidence of Buller's attempt at Vaal Krantz from the intensity of the sound of artillery bombardment. Again the expectation of relief was dispelled by the unwelcome tidings that Buller, having won his way across the Tugela for a second time, had found it expedient to retrace his steps. It cannot be said that any excessive feeling of despair overtook the garrison when the news was promulgated. Depression at the time was general, but the mental condition of the invested force was rather one of resignation joined to one of dogged determination to face the worst. The general health of the garrison, however, showed improvement after January. This was probably the natural result of a survival of the fittest. But the condition of the sick gave cause for grave apprehension. In the three weeks which preceded the news of the relief of Kimberley there were 129 deaths from disease alone, including seven officers.

Feb. 16–27. The garrison

The 16th of February may be said to have been the turning-point of the fortunes of the Ladysmith garrison. On

this date a message was received from Lord Roberts announcing the relief of Kimberley, and Buller gave some information concerning his new plan of operations. It was then realized that if the relief was to come from the south it would arrive through the Hlangwane, Cingolo, and Monte Cristo Hills. When General Buller practically reverted to his original line of attack, the garrison began to doubt the possibility of relief at all, and received the news of the occupation of the hills south of the Tugela with scant enthusiasm. On Monday, February 26, the garrison may be said to have reached the lowest point in general despondency. On the previous Thursday Buller had signalled in such confident language that the force had been placed upon full rations. Then, day by day, the garrison had watched for some sign of the promised relief. Daily the guns had boomed, and occasionally a glimpse had been caught of the burst of an "accidental"—but nothing more. Heavy weather set in and blinded the little winking reflector on Monte Cristo Hill. On Sunday night the sound of volley firing was distinctly audible in Ladysmith. Then came a day of silence. The heliograph was veiled in cloud and there were no sounds of war. The spirits of the garrison fell. Grave rumours circulated. Native report said that for the third time the relief column had recrossed the Tugela. Monday brought a wave of hope, for at mid-day there was a gleam of sunshine, and with it came the news of Cronje's predicament at Paardeberg. Nevertheless it behoved Sir George White to be cautious, and, although the following day confirmed Cronje's surrender, yet the evening saw the garrison again reduced to quarter rations. This was only a precautionary measure, for Buller had heliographed, "Everything progressing favourably."

watch for Buller's last attempt at relief.

In reality the tide had turned. On Wednesday morning the observation posts reported the enemy to be in full retreat on both sides of the town. The Boers were retiring. Both the wagon roads leading to Modder Spruit and Pepworth were choked with transport. Long lines of tilted wagons lurched forward as fast as the teamsters could urge them. Droves of cattle were heading to the passes, spider buggies could be discerned threading their way between the

blocks of heavy vehicles. Guns, even, were being withdrawn. In their present reduced condition it was impossible for the garrison to do more than content themselves with testing the range of their guns upon the fugitives.

Feb. 28. The relief.

On Majuba Day the Bulwana "Long Tom" had treated Ladysmith to a salute of twenty-one guns. On Wednesday morning, about 10 o'clock, it fired a solitary round into the town. The observation posts then observed men working upon the parapet dismantling the gun. About noon on the same day the heliograph brought the following message from Buller: "Have thoroughly beaten the enemy. Believe them to be in full retreat. Have sent my cavalry to ascertain which way they have gone." This great news—the news for which the garrison had longed for months—spread rapidly throughout the perimeter.

But another and greater surprise was in store for the long-suffering garrison. About 5 o'clock, as Colonel Hamilton's staff sat on Cæsar's Camp watching the effect of the shell-fire which the Naval Gunners had reopened on Bulwana, a few khaki-clad horsemen appeared over the folds of the plain in the vicinity of Intombi. Then more appeared, and the fan of an advanced guard opened out. At last the truth dawned upon the little group of officers. It was Buller's cavalry. There was no doubt about it now—a squadron moved out into the open. It was the head of the relieving column. A cheer rose from the Manchester Regiment's outposts on Cæsar's Camp and communicated the good news to the garrison.

The scenes that followed were most impressive. The garrison of Ladysmith, excepting the troops on duty in the trenches, hastened down to the drift over the Klip River to welcome the new arrivals. The incoming cavalry, a column 300 strong, halted and formed up on the far bank, while the leading files began to water their horses in the stream. A silence came over the siege-worn spectators. The men looked so strong and well. Their horses, in spite of the rough usage of campaigning, were round and sleek and fat. The contrast with the condition existing in the town was so striking that for the moment it dazed the crowd into silence.

Then the little column came splashing through the ford with Major Mackenzie, Natal Carabineers, Major Bottomley, I.L.H., and Captain Gough, 16th Lancers, at its head. It consisted of Imperial Light Horse, Natal Carabineers, and some Border Mounted Police. It was a Colonial force. This rendered the incoming all the more touching. Brothers found sisters, uncles met nephews, and the majority found friends, acquaintances, or relatives waiting to give them welcome. Women, with streaming eyes, pressed forward to grasp the hands of their deliverers. As the welcome force marched into the town the cheering passed up and down the line. Children flocked to the garden gates, and Ladysmith was wreathed in smiles and gay with waving handkerchiefs. Yet there were many who could not cheer. Their hearts were too full, for the advent of news from the south told its sad tale of death amongst friends and relatives in the three months' struggle to set free a British garrison. The relief of Ladysmith had cost 6,000 casualties.

In the main street the relief advance guard was met by Sir George White and staff. It seemed that ten years had been taken off the General's life, so changed was his appearance from what it had been during the previous week. As soon as the newcomers recognised him they burst into a deafening cheer. The garrison joined, and the tumult was furious. The crowd surged round the general, and when he could be heard he addressed a few words to the assembled mass. He congratulated the relieving cavalry, and, turning to the civilians of the garrison, thanked them for the brave support which they had rendered him. He said that it had gone to his heart to reduce their rations, but he promised that it should not happen again. Then the crowd closed in upon Buller's volunteers, begging for cigarettes, a fill of English tobacco, a piece of wheaten bread—any of the luxuries of which they had been so long deprived.

Review of the siege.

Thus ended the most memorable siege in the history of South Africa. The considerations which induced Sir George White to submit to investment after the unsuccessful issue of the engagement on October 30, 1899, and the influence of his decision upon the whole course of the war, have been dis-

cussed at length in previous volumes.* The main factors, indeed, stand out clearly. On the one hand Sir George White's failure to maintain the part of a defensive field force made shipwreck of the whole British plan of campaign, and was thus in a sense the cause of all the disasters that followed. On the other, his decision to maintain his hold upon Ladysmith and to face investment rather than the uncertainties of a continued retreat, undoubtedly exercised a potent influence in bringing the whole Boer invasion of Natal to a standstill, in paralysing Boer strategy, and robbing it of all initiative. Whether what was thus gained ever compensated for what was lost can only be a matter of opinion, not of certainty. A balancing of all the detailed factors and probabilities involved confirms the writer in the conclusion already expressed, that White's decision was natural and defensible, but that a general of the first rank would have decided otherwise.

Advantage of a wide perimeter.

The dispositions for the defence have similarly been fully treated, and it only remains to refer briefly to the tactical lessons disclosed by the siege. The principal lesson was in essence the same as that learnt with regard to operations in the field, the enormous advantages conferred by the range and rapidity of modern rifle fire upon wide extensions, alike by subjecting the attackers to converging lateral fire, and by keeping them at arm's length and depriving their artillery of definite targets. Not that the defence of Ladysmith showed the boldest and most consequential acceptance of that lesson. The defenders, indeed, were convinced that they were running grave risks in attempting to hold so extended a perimeter with so small a force; the example of Kimberley and Mafeking would suggest that the perimeter was, on the contrary, too small, and that the defenders, had they realised the offensive weakness of the Boers, would have greatly facilitated their own task and that of the relieving force, and impeded the efforts of the Boers, if they had given themselves more elbow-room. The necessity for maintaining a complete system of communications and a means of rapidly supporting any section of the defences was

* Vol. ii., pp. 260–264, 281–283; vol. iii., pp. 145–150.

one that was well illustrated by the events of January 6, 1900. As regards the actual construction of field works, the siege produced no striking discoveries. On the one hand Ladysmith was unprovided with the appliances or labour requisite for the creation of works of a really elaborate character, and on the other the Boer attack was never sufficiently serious or concentrated to call for heavy fortifications or for the exhausting and nerve-straining struggle of mine and countersap.

Passive character of the defence.

Of the general character of the defence, the most striking feature was that it was purely passive. Except for the two successful sorties in December, no attempt was made to disturb the Boers in any way or to test the strength of the investing force. Sir George White was ready and anxious to co-operate vigorously with Sir Redvers Buller as soon as the latter's force should come within reach. But he set his face resolutely, not only against sorties on a large scale, but also against all those minor offensive operations whose object is to harry the besiegers and to encourage the garrison. Casualties were thus undoubtedly avoided, but only at the cost of a corresponding immunity to the Boers, and, indirectly, at the cost of the relieving army. Moreover, against the possible loss of life in fighting should be set the loss of life from disease to which the monotony of a purely waiting defence and the absence of all stirring incident undoubtedly contributed. In this respect the defence of Ladysmith compares unfavourably with that of Mafeking, or even that of Kimberley. This is all the more apparent when the forces concerned are taken into consideration. At Mafeking the defence was conducted in the main by recently levied irregulars. Except for a small nucleus of regular infantry and not over-efficient volunteers, the bulk of the defenders of Kimberley were untrained civilians. The Ladysmith garrison was a field force of regulars, complete in all arms, and it was hardly thought necessary till quite late in the siege to enlist the energies of the civilian population in order to set free more men for active enterprises.

But though there may be much ground for discussion or

Fine spirit of the defence.

criticism, whether in Sir G. White's original decision to submit to a siege, or in the actual defensive policy pursued, there can be only one verdict on the spirit with which that policy was carried out. From the gallant veteran in command—harassed by his responsibilities, distracted by the news of disaster and faint-heartedness without, shaken by fever—down to the simple private enduring hunger and discomfort in the trenches, one and the same resolution animated the whole defence. Ladysmith was to be held at all costs; whether relief came or not the defence was to be carried on to the last; when all else failed the garrison would try to break its way out or perish in the attempt. It was in this spirit that the flag was kept flying, and it is for this reason that the siege of Ladysmith will live in the annals of the British Army.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SIEGE OF KIMBERLEY

THE reasons which, at the outbreak of the war, impelled the Free Staters to select Kimberley as the main objective of their operations have been discussed in a previous volume. The reputed fabulous wealth of the Diamond City, its actual military usefulness as a railway and supply base, the ancient grievance of its incorporation in British territory, and, last but not least, the hatred of Rhodes and the desire to wrest from his grasp the stronghold of his power and the financial mainspring of his nefarious plots against Afrikanderdom, were arguments against which no purely strategical plans for pushing into the heart of Cape Colony could have hoped to prevail.* Moreover, lying defenceless on the open veld, within a stone's throw of the Free State border, and linked to far distant Cape Town by nothing but the single track that for its last seventy miles from the Orange River was all within easy reach of the commandos, Kimberley seemed too easy and tempting a prize to pass by before proceeding to more arduous tasks—tasks which, besides, would only be facilitated by the moral effect of this first successful stroke.

Boer motives for attacking Kimberley.

The defenceless state of the city had from the first occasionally disquieted the leading inhabitants. As early as 1896, indeed, Colonel David Harris, one of the Kimberley members of the Cape Assembly, had induced his colleagues on the board of the De Beers Company to store, in case of emergencies, a battery of 6 Maxims, 750 Lee-Metford rifles, and 750,000 rounds of ammunition, bought in connection with the Raid, and, about the same time, furnished the Imperial authorities at Cape Town with a secretly executed military survey of the town and its environs. In 1898, at the request

Kimberley and the Schreiner Government.

* See vol. i., p. 46; vol. ii., pp. 121–126, 134, 135.

of the Premier, Sir Gordon Sprigg, Colonel J. K. Trotter visited Kimberley and prepared a scheme for its defence. But it was not till the failure of the Bloemfontein Conference that any serious anxiety was felt. Several private meetings were held in Kimberley, and on June 12 the Mayor telegraphed to the Government at Cape Town urging the necessity of measures for defence being undertaken, and begging that, at any rate, a battery of 7-pounders for the re-arming of the Diamond Fields Artillery, and other arms and ammunition lying in store at King Williamstown, should be sent up at once. But the message, with its emphatic conclusion, "If you cannot or will not protect us, give us arms and we will protect ourselves," had no effect upon Mr. Schreiner, whose one anxiety was not to wound Boer susceptibilities. His reply was characteristic: "There is no reason whatever for apprehending that Kimberley is, or in any contemplated event will be, in danger of attack; and Mr. Schreiner is of opinion that your fears are groundless and your anticipation without foundation." On August 24 a deputation of citizens waited on the Mayor urging the necessity of organising some sort of defence; but the Mayor's communications with Cape Town only drew the temporising reply that the Government was "fully alive to the importance of the defence of Kimberley in case need should arrive." Direct negotiations with subordinates proved more effective, and the artillery was safely smuggled up to Kimberley in September before Mr. Schreiner could stop it. To the ordinary loyalist in Cape Colony this attitude of Mr. Schreiner's, especially when contrasted with his acquiescence in the passage of arms and ammunition to the Free State, seemed little short of treasonable. The only measure sanctioned by Mr. Schreiner at this period was the establishment of a series of small posts of the Cape Police along the border from Kimberley to Mafeking, and the placing of a few railway guards at the more important bridges south of Kimberley.*

* See vol. i., p. 305; vol. ii., pp. 110, 111. Commissioner Robinson of the Police was appointed Commandant of all the Colonial forces in Griqualand West and Bechuanaland, and commanded in Kimberley till superseded by Colonel Kekewich.

Kimberley met with more sympathy and better success when it turned to the Governor. Sir A. Milner assured the Mayor that Kimberley would not be forgotten in any scheme of frontier defence carried out by the Imperial forces. As a matter of fact, Colonel Trotter, acting upon orders from the War Office, had revisited the city at the beginning of July, and had made a fuller report on its defences. Returning to Cape Town, he left behind him Major Scott-Turner, Royal Highlanders, with a mission to make secret preparations for local organisation. Two other special service officers, Captain O'Meara and Lieutenant MacInnes, both of the Royal Engineers, arrived later, the former to devote himself to intelligence and surveying in the district, the latter to design suitable works for the defence. It was obvious from the outset that Kimberley would have to rely mainly upon its own citizens for its defence, at any rate during the initial stages of the war, and that all it could hope to get from the Imperial authorities was a good commanding officer, a nucleus of regulars, and, it was hoped, a fair supply of artillery and ammunition. The officer selected for the task of organising the defence, as well as of holding the general command over all the forces in Griqualand West and Bechuanaland, was Lieutenant-Colonel R. G. Kekewich of the Loyal North Lancashires. On September 13 Colonel Kekewich arrived in Kimberley on a confidential mission. His report convinced Sir A. Milner that it was impossible to run an unnecessary risk any longer. On the 18th he extorted from his argumentative Prime Minister a reluctant acquiescence in the despatch to Kimberley and to Orange River Bridge of the Loyal North Lancashires, with some artillery and other details, and, a few days later, in the construction of defences, which was begun on the 25th.

Sept. 13. Arrival of Col. Kekewich.

On September 20 Kekewich was formally appointed to his command, and was joined on the same day by half his battalion, by the 23rd Company W.D.R.A., with six 7-pounders,* and a handful of Engineers. This was all the "nucleus" that could be spared even for so important a task.

Raising of Town Guard and Kimberley Light Horse.

* Two of these did not reach Kimberley till October 12.

As for the local forces that were to supplement the regulars, the volunteer movement had languished sadly under the shadow of an unsympathetic administration, and the Kimberley Regiment, Diamond Fields Horse, and Diamond Fields Artillery mustered barely 800 men between them, and these in no exceptional state of efficiency. Besides these, there were the Police, the greater portion of whom Kekewich had already determined to concentrate upon Kimberley as soon as hostilities broke out. The force thus available was wholly inadequate for the defence, and recourse to the raising of fresh forces from among the citizens was necessary. On the 30th Sir A. Milner sanctioned the enrolment of the Kimberley and Beaconsfield Town Guards. A simple organisation had already been framed by Scott-Turner; and though, for the first day or two, recruiting was slow, owing to the inability of the ordinary civilian to realise that the handful of Imperial troops was not sufficient for the task of defending the town, yet by October 8 the force mustered 1,400 men on parade, and eventually rose to over 2,000. The command was assigned to Colonel Harris, who had shown conspicuous activity in the work of recruiting and organisation. Further recruiting brought the existing volunteer corps up to a total strength of over 800; these were formally called out on October 4 by Sir A. Milner. The raising of a second mounted corps was also sanctioned; and on October 13 recruiting was opened for it under the name of the Kimberley Light Horse. Mr. Rhodes, who reached Kimberley that same day by one of the last trains that still got through, was made honorary colonel, and threw himself heart and soul into the work of helping Scott-Turner. Through Mr. Fynn, the manager of the De Beers farms, he bought sufficient horses to mount the corps up to a strength of 400, and also to provide remounts for the Diamond Fields Horse and transport for Colonel Chamier's guns.* In one way or another,

* These and other expenses incurred by the De Beers Company for Mr. Rhodes were subsequently repaid by the Imperial authorities. But it was an undoubted advantage to the defence to have someone prepared to undertake large financial responsibility without waiting for authorization. Imperial officers, unaccustomed to spend a shilling without special permission in peace, could not always, with the best intentions, instantly

Colonel R. G. Kekewich, C.B.,
Commandant of Kimberley.
Photo by Elliott & Fry.

by the time the Boers closed in on Kimberley Kekewich found himself in command of some 800–900 mounted men, nearly 3,000 foot soldiers of every degree of training, from the old soldiers of his own regiment down to the rawest recruit in the Town Guard, 14 muzzle-loading 7-pounders, and 11 Maxims.*

Shortage of rifles and artillery

The real limit to the recruiting of defenders was not the want of men but of arms. A considerable number of rifles was purchased by telegram from merchants in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and Grahamstown, and reached Kimberley during the first week in October. On the 13th the De Beers Board, convoked by Mr. Rhodes, sent an urgent request to the Governor for 1,000 more rifles and proportionate ammunition, offering to pay for the cost themselves, and suggesting that one or two 15-pounders, or, if possible, some naval guns, might also be forwarded.† On the same day Kekewich also telegraphed for 1,000 rifles. But it was too late. A section of the new 15-pounder battery of the Prince Alfred's Own Cape Artillery, which would have been most useful, got no further than Orange River, and the only guns or arms of any sort that entered Kimberley after the 13th were two of the Cape Police 7-pounders from Vryburg and 120 Martini-Henrys, yielded up very reluctantly by the magistrate of Barkly West. Even for the 7-pounders there were not more than 2,600 rounds; and it was only after the experiment of making shell in the De Beers workshops was sanctioned and successfully carried out that Colonel Chamier dared use his little weapons with any freedom.

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adapt themselves to the wholly different procedure demanded by war. Even the special service officers sent up before the war to collect intelligence and make secret preparations were given sums inadequate for the purposes of respectable commercial travellers. It was quite exceptional that Colonel Kekewich, on going up to Kimberley, was provided with the sum of £400 to cover possible expenses.

* The table on the following page, adapted from Sir F. H. E. Cunliffe's 'History of the Boer War,' gives the organization and maximum strength of the Kimberley garrison.

† Mr. Rhodes simultaneously sent a characteristic private message to the military secretary:—"Do your best to help us. It makes one wild to see good men walking about asking for arms and we have none to give them."

—	Strength.			Officers Commanding.
	Officers.	Men.	Guns and Maxims.	
Regulars:—				
Half-battalion L. N. Lancs.	9	413	—	Major (local Lt.-Col.) W. H. E. Murray.
Detachment L. N. Lancs. M.I.	1	21	—	
23rd Co. W.D.R.A.	3	90	6 (7-prs.)	Major (local Lt.-Col.) G. D. Chamier.
Section 7th Co. R.E.	1	50	—	Lieut. R. I. MacClintock.
Total of Regular Troops	14	574	6	
Volunteers:—				
Diamond Fields Artillery	5	108	6 (7-prs.)	Capt. S. May.
Diamond Fields Horse	6	226	—	Major T. H. Rodger.
Kimberley Volunteer Regiment	22	473	—	Lt.-Col. R. A. Finlayson.
Maxims	—	—	2	
Total of Volunteers	33	807	8	
Local Levies:—				
Kimberley Town Guard	85	1,354	—	Lt.-Col. D. Harris.
Beaconsfield Town Guard	17	341	—	Major J. R. Fraser.
Kenilworth Defence Force	6	97	—	
Municipal Guard	6	193	—	
Permanent Guard	5	164	—	
De Beers Maxim Battery	—	44	6 Maxims	
Cyclist Corps	6	79	—	
Kimberley Light Horse	29	398	—	Major (local Lt.-Col.) H. Scott-Turner.
Total	154	2,670	6	
Cape Police, dismounted	4	119	—	Commissioner M. B. Robinson.
" " mounted	18	337	2 (7-prs.)	
Maxims	—	—	3	
Total	22	456	5	
Grand total	223	4,507	14 (7-prs.) 11 Maxims	

Extent of Kimberley and suburbs.

The problem which Kekewich, with his small force, was called upon to solve was by no means an easy one, especially from the point of view with regard to excessive extensions

which prevailed before the war. Comprising, with its suburbs, a population of some 50,000 inhabitants of all races and colours, Kimberley straggled over a very wide area. The city proper had grown up more or less by haphazard round the two vast pits—the biggest holes ever dug by man—known as the Kimberley and De Beers mines, and measured nearly two miles each way. About a mile south-east of the outskirts lay the township of Beaconsfield, which had sprung up round the Du Toit's Pan and Bultfontein Mines, and south of these again was the village of Wesselton. The Wesselton or Premier Mine was two miles east of the village, and over four from the centre of Kimberley, on the actual border of the Free State. North-east of the town, and fully three miles from its centre, is the pleasant garden-suburb of Kenilworth, created by Mr. Rhodes for the De Beers employés.

Area covered by the defence.

The original scheme worked out by Colonel Trotter only contemplated the defence of Kimberley proper and the holding of the Premier Mine by an isolated garrison. The retention of this latter point was essential to any prolonged defence, as the springs in the mine would be the only adequate water supply available as soon as the Boers cut the main supply from the Vaal at Riverton.* But when Kekewich made known his intention of carrying out this scheme he was faced by so strong and indignant a protest from the inhabitants of Beaconsfield that he judged it better to give way and provide for the defence of the place, though independently of the main *enceinte*. He had, anyhow, to hold two redoubts north of Beaconsfield to cover the water supply. As a matter of fact, too, civilian sentiment in this case coincided with what was sound military policy under the peculiar conditions of modern warfare, especially against

* Without the supply from the Premier Mine Kimberley might have subsisted three or four weeks on the water in the reservoir and in Kenilworth dam, and possibly longer by using and enlarging private wells, but with the certainty of a serious epidemic. A short pipe line was laid to connect the Premier supply, which ordinarily provided Kenilworth, with the waterworks system near Blankenberg's Vley; and as soon as the Boers occupied Riverton the Premier water was pumped directly into the Kimberley reservoir.

an enemy so reluctant to press home an attack, for the extension of the area held undoubtedly helped to keep the enemy at arm's length. Subsequently, in view of the inactivity of the Boers, Kenilworth and Wesselton, and the Otto's Kopje Mine to the north-west of the town, were also included in the defences. Judging after the event, one might even suggest that it would have been possible to occupy Carter's Ridge, three miles west of the town, and Kamfersdam, four miles to the north-west. This extension of the defence by lengthening the lines of investment and depriving the Boers of the great convenience of being able to make their laager at the intermediate pumping-station north of Kamfersdam, might, indeed, have prevented the investment ever being made complete on the western side. But there is no ground for charging Kekewich with undue timidity. On the contrary, considering the circumstances, he deserves every credit for his boldness in occupying with his little force a perimeter which eventually covered fully twenty miles.

Favourable situation of Kimberley. The tailing heaps.

Apart from its straggling shape and the difficulty of the water supply, Kimberley was not badly situated for defence. The circumstances of its origin had caused it—in this respect like Johannesburg—to spring up in a position where no Boer would have dreamt of placing a town. Instead of nestling under a circle of kopjes—better shelters from the breeze than from artillery—it lies well out on the open rolling veld. The low Reservoir plateau, on whose northern slope the city lies, is, indeed, the highest ground within a radius of seven or eight miles. Carter's Ridge and the Wimbledon Ridges to west and south-west, the Susannah Ridge seven miles to the south-east, and Dronfield Ridge seven miles to the north, are about equally high; but northwards towards Diebel's Vley, and southwards to Alexandersfontein, the ground slopes considerably. But the chief tactical feature of Kimberley and its environs was due to the same cause that had fixed the situation of the town. The great grey blue heaps of "tailings" from the mines, standing 40 to 120 feet high, and scattered all round the town, provided a series of natural defences requiring very little labour for their conversion into excellent redoubts

The great industry which had created these mounds now helped to find the labour and the materials for putting them to their novel use. From September 25 onwards De Beers supplied large gangs of compound natives, and unlimited quantities of timber, galvanised iron, sacks, barbed wire, dynamite, and batteries for the necessary shelters, breastworks, entanglements and mines. A barbed wire entanglement was run round the whole ten miles of the main defence, strengthened, where practicable, by a stiff abattis of mimosa and thorn bushes, cut down to clear the front. Wire fences and abattis were also constructed round Beaconsfield and Kenilworth. By the outbreak of war the work was sufficiently far advanced to enable the garrison to check a rush, and it was fully completed long before the actual investment began. In all that concerned preparations, Kimberley certainly enjoyed a great advantage over Ladysmith. General character of the defences.

The defence of the main *enceinte* was divided into five sections, running from left to right. Section A.—From the Kimberley Mine on the west, along the whole north-western quadrant, and across the railway as far as the Transvaal Road, including the tailing heaps surrounding the mine-head, which were fortified under the following nomenclature—Kimberley Breastworks, Old Kimberley Redoubt, New Kimberley Redoubt, Smith's Redoubt, No. 1 and No. 2 Searchlight Redoubts. Section B.—Transvaal Road to Convict Station, including Kenilworth Redoubt, Kenilworth Dam, Stables Redoubt, Crusher Mill, Marosis Mount. Section C.—The De Beers Convict Station to the Lodge (just south of the railway), including Rinderpest Redoubt, De Beers Redoubt,* Boshof Redan, and Belgravia Redoubt. Section D.—The Lodge to No. 7 Redoubt, including Lodge Lunette, the Sanatorium and its breastworks, and Kumo House (at the south-eastern angle of the defences). Section E.—Completing the circle to the Kimberley Mine, including Camp Redoubt, Civil Service Redoubt, the Reservoir, and Schmidt's Redoubts. Beaconsfield was protected on the south by a wire entanglement connecting it with the south- Their disposition.

* East of De Beers Mine; the redoubt north of Kenilworth, marked as De Beers Redoubt on the map, is No. 2 De Beers Redoubt.

eastern angle of the main defences, by entanglements and small redoubts on the tailing heaps south of the Bultfontein Mine, the most advanced post on this side being the redoubt on Davis's Heap south of Wesselton. There were some light defences east of Du Toit's Pan, covering the water supply; and serving the same purpose, and also providing a gun position, a work on New Gordon Heap north of Blankenberg's Vley. Towards the end of November, No. 2 De Beers Redoubt (known also as Fort Rhodes) was constructed on a tailing heap north of Kenilworth; the surrounding bush was cut down and converted into an abattis. Smaller redoubts and shelters for the cattle guards were also pushed out in several directions a mile or so in front of the defences.* Large numbers of mines, to be fired on observation, were fixed wherever there was dead ground, especially south of Beaconsfield, while dummy ones were planted ostentatiously in other places. The fear of these mines, real and imaginary, undoubtedly contributed greatly to the extreme reluctance of the Boers to come to close quarters with the defences. Another useful contribution to the defence made by De Beers, and one even more valuable for its moral effect than for its actual use, was available in the shape of the searchlights used for protecting the depositing floors of the mines. Five of these powerful lights, known to the Boers as "Rhodes's eyes," were distributed round the perimeters, viz., at the Premier Mine, Rinderpest Redoubt, the Reservoir, No. 1 Searchlight Redoubt, and No. 2 De Beers Redoubt. Three of these were of 25,000 candle-power each, the remainder of 12,000 candle-power. The whole of the defences were put into telephonic communication, and Kekewich, on his conning tower, 157 feet high, improvised from the headgear of the De Beers Mine, was thus able, not only to survey the whole country for miles round, but also to keep complete control over all his forces. It was from here, too, that Colonel Chamier, in view of the scarcity of ammunition, personally controlled all the artillery fire.

* Detailed descriptions of the defences and the manner of their construction, with a series of maps, are given in the 'Professional Papers of the Corps of Royal Engineers,' vol. xxvi.

Distribution of troops. Staff arrangements.

The perimeter was held almost entirely by the citizen forces, each work being manned by some fifty to one hundred men. A company of the North Lancashires under Captain O'Brien was, however, posted at the Premier Mine, in addition to some 300 local guards, and a company at the Sanatorium. Of the guns, a section apiece of the Royal Artillery was posted at the Premier, at the Reservoir, and at the Crusher Redoubt, while a section of the Diamond Fields Artillery was placed at No. 2 Redoubt near the Kimberley Mine. The rest of the regular infantry, the mounted troops, and the remaining guns provided Kekewich with a small reserve for active operations, and were mostly quartered in the Botanical Gardens south of the De Beers Mine. Colonel Scott-Turner was appointed to the command of the mounted troops a few days after the outbreak of hostilities. Major O'Meara, the intelligence officer, consequently became Kekewich's chief staff officer, and the staff was further strengthened by the addition of Lieutenant MacInnes. Commissioner Robinson was appointed Town Commandant. Supplies were controlled by Captain (local Major) Gorle, A.S.C., who also acted as paymaster.

Supplies available

The question of supplies naturally played an important part in the siege from the very first. The population of Kimberley at the outbreak of the siege was estimated at 50,000, including some 13,000 whites, 7,000 Cape Boys and Asiatics, and 30,000 natives. As a matter of fact the figures were somewhat higher, probably owing to the influx of loyalist refugees, and the census carried out in December with a view to removal of part of the population gave a total of 55,000. As the commercial centre of a wide district, Kimberley was generally well stocked with supplies; and in view of eventualities the De Beers company had added considerably to its normal stock. Some 14,000 tons of wood and 7,000 tons of coal were brought in by them, and they had some six months' supply for 10,000 natives in hand when the siege began. Mr. Rhodes on his arrival at once telegraphed to all the ports for enormous quantities of supplies, but not in time to secure them. Additional supplies were secured by the bringing in to Kimberley of stuff on the railway at Modder

River and elsewhere, destined for the republics, and by the driving in, almost under the nose of the invading commandos, of nearly 2,000 oxen and horses. At the end of October Kekewich reported that he had seventy days' meat and bread and forty-two days' forage in hand. In view of the attempts of traders to run up prices, after communication was cut, a proclamation was issued fixing prices at the level they had been previously. In the case of meat, a slight increase was sanctioned, but the butchers were forbidden to sell more than half a pound per head, and clerks were subsequently placed in their shops to supervise the issue. On the same day Major Gorle bought up all the biscuits and preserved meat that could be got in bulk. Early in November a supply committee was formed and took over all supplies of breadstuffs and sugar, only issuing to dealers enough for a week's sale at a time. All forage was likewise taken over by the authorities for the use of the forces. Prices, and the amounts which any individual was allowed to purchase, were fixed from time to time by proclamation. There was no free issue of rations to the public.*

Oct. 14–Nov. 3. Boers close in gradually.

The principal events on the western theatre of war and in the neighbourhood of Kimberley during the first fortnight of the war have already been recounted elsewhere.† It will be sufficient to remind the reader that Kimberley's ordinary means of communication with the outside world were interrupted on the evening of October 14, Kekewich's last talk over the wire to the High Commissioner being abruptly cut short at 10.45 P.M. by the arrival of a Boer detachment at Spytfontein. Next day Kekewich proclaimed a state of siege and appointed a special court of summary jurisdiction under the presidency of Mr. Justice Lange. The various detachments of Cape Police were safely concentrated in Kimberley by the 23rd. On the 27th the first encounter between the Kimberley garrison and the Boers took place at Macfarlane's Siding, and on the ridges east of Dronfield. The general outline of that action has already been given. But it may

* Except in the case of the people who took refuge in the mines from the shelling, February 12–15.

† See vol. ii., pp. 271–276.

be worth adding that at one moment in the day the section of the Diamond Fields Artillery under Major May, which had gone out to support Scott-Turner, was nearly cut off by the Boers, who had got in between it and the mounted troops. It held its ground most gallantly, but the guns had only six rounds left, and the escort had fired their last cartridge before the arrival of the North Lancashire reinforcements induced the Boers to retire. In any case the general result of the engagement, in which the Boers, though probably numerically superior, were driven off the field with the loss of their commandant and a fair number of other casualties, as compared with a British loss of three killed and nineteen wounded, was one which undoubtedly contributed to strengthen the confidence of the garrison. Over a week elapsed before the Boers began effectively closing in on the town. On November 3 they achieved their first success by lifting 100 dairy cows, 200 slaughter oxen, and the whole of the mules of the sanitary service from the western side of the defences. By this date their combined commandos round Kimberley probably numbered fully 5,000 men.

Nov. 4. Wessels's ultimatum. His offer to women and children.

On the morning of the 4th, Chief Commandant Wessels, whose headquarters were now at Oliphantsfontein, sent Kekewich a formal summons to surrender, to which the latter replied by an invitation to Wessels to "effect the occupation of the town as an operation of war." To his summons Wessels had added the suggestion that Kekewich, if resolved not to surrender, should cause all the women and children to leave Kimberley, so as to be out of danger. He was prepared to receive Afrikander families in his own camp and to allow free passage to all others. To facilitate this he announced that he would grant an armistice till 6 A.M. on the 6th. Kekewich and his staff discussed this offer in consultation with Rhodes. The exact purport of the offer, which was in Dutch, did not seem quite clear to them, and indeed they seem to have construed it* as only an invitation to remove the women and children outside of the town, in other words, to form a special laager, such as that

* See vol. iii., p. 454, for another instance of confusion arising from imperfect knowledge of Dutch.

which in those very same days was being formed at Ladysmith, an arrangement which would have had few advantages and involved great difficulties of organisation. In any case there was no transport available in Kimberley to convey any large number to Orange River, even if Wessels had given the refugees a definite safe conduct all the way. It was decided not to pay any attention to the offer or to make it public in Kimberley, except as regarded the Afrikander element. Large though this was, only five persons availed themselves of the opportunity. The decision not to publish the whole offer, with the reasons for its rejection, was perhaps unfortunate. When it became known, towards the end of the month, from a captured Boer paper, some of the inhabitants, fretting under the restrictions of the siege, made a grievance out of this concealment of an opportunity which, at the time, they would not have dreamt of accepting.

Attempts to get rid of natives.

The desirability of getting rid of some of the natives was, however, strongly felt, and it was decided to make attempts to send them out in batches. On the night of the 6th Rhodes, apparently on his own initiative, let loose some 3,000 from the Premier Mine, who, however, were turned back by the Boers. Later on in the siege, when provisions grew scarce, renewed attempts were made, and with almost unaccountable success. Carefully coached by Mr. Fynn in what they were to say to the Boers, they generally succeeded in playing on the desire of the latter to keep on good terms with the natives, especially the Basutos and northern tribes; and though some parties were turned back, as many as 8,000 are said to have got out in the course of the siege.

Nov. 6–13. Opening days of the siege.

The actual siege opened on the 6th with a couple of shots, directed against the Premier Mine, from guns near Susannah. On the 7th the Boer gunners opened from several quarters and fired some fifty rounds, and from that day onwards a desultory and harmless bombardment was kept up with some half a dozen guns. Kekewich, determined not to be inactive, sent out reconnaissances most days, the chief being to Carter's Ridge on the 11th and 16th, and towards Alexandersfontein on the 17th. On the 12th Mr. Labram, the talented American chief engineer of De Beers, received permission to try and

make percussion fuzes and shells, and within a few days turned out some very serviceable ammunition to supplement the scanty stock in hand. As large numbers of the natives and many of the white inhabitants were out of employment by the gradual cessation of work on the mines,* Mr. Rhodes conceived the idea of starting relief-works, and a great deal was thus done during the siege in the way of making roads, planting avenues, etc., for the permanent benefit of the town. Mr. Rhodes, indeed, in this and in many other respects, made himself the very life and soul of the defence.

Mr. Rhodes's attitude.

But there is another aspect of his activities during the siege which it is impossible to ignore, and which, if it did not in the actual result prejudice the general conduct of the campaign or endanger the defence of Kimberley, yet might well have done both, and at any rate succeeded in bringing about increasingly strained relations between himself and the leading civilians, who stood under his influence, on the one side, and Kekewich and his staff on the other. Rhodes's one object in going to Kimberley, at considerable personal risk, was to use the almost supreme authority and influence he enjoyed there in order to help in the organisation of an effective defence. He had not been there many hours before he realised to the full the seriousness of the situation involved in the defence of so extended a perimeter by a handful of regulars assisted by a few thousand untrained civilians. The recognition of Kimberley's danger, in one of Rhodes's temperament, involved a corresponding oblivion of the dangers and difficulties which the military authorities had to face elsewhere. The subsequent feeling of impotence, created by isolation from the outer world and by the necessity of military control, was one which he of all men was least qualified to endure.

His impatience for relief.

From the first day that the Boers cut the line Rhodes began to call impatiently for relief. On October 16 he sent a telegram to Sir A. Milner urging that the military authorities should "strain a point" to send relief, "because

* Nearly a quarter of a million loads were hoisted out of the mines in the opening weeks of the siege, but the shortage of coal and dynamite eventually necessitated a suspension of all active operations.

if Kimberley falls everything goes." Pointing out that there were 1,600 men between Orange River and De Aar, and that the Naval Brigade was also available, he added: "Surely you can put relief through, and then we can relieve Mafeking. I cannot understand delay." The High Commissioner in reply pointed out the unwisdom of courting disaster by attempting relief with an inadequate force, and assured him that the authorities were fully alive to the importance of Kimberley. Meanwhile, on the 17th, Rhodes sent a message to the Chartered Company to cable to Lord Rothschild to see the Cabinet and press for immediate relief. "It is perfectly possible; but military authorities at Cape Town will do nothing." A message to Sir A. Milner on the 18th was to the same effect, and was followed on the 21st by the contemptuous suggestion: "I suppose it will end in our relieving you at Orange River." On the 29th a formal message was sent in the name of the De Beers directors, expressing the hope that, with the arrival of General Buller, measures would be taken for immediate relief, recapitulating the difficulties of the situation from the De Beers' point of view, especially with regard to the control of the natives, and concluding by a request for information, "so as to enable us to take our own steps in case relief is refused." This last passage, which obviously only referred to the disposal of the natives on the cessation of work, was, however, taken by Buller to imply a threat of surrender, and he telegraphed to Kekewich, who sent a reassuring reply to the effect that the only danger that could arise would be the failure of the Town Guard to stand the strain of trench work.*

Excited telegrams to Sir A. Milner.

A reassuring message from Milner expressing a belief that, in view of experiences at Mafeking and elsewhere, Kimberley was safe for weeks, inquiries from Buller as to the longest period for which the stores would last, rumours that Kimberley was only to be relieved indirectly, added to the final closing in of the Boers, brought Rhodes's impatience to a head in the early days of November. On the 1st and 4th renewed appeals for relief were sent, and on the 5th a whole batch of hysterical telegrams was despatched from

* See evidence, Royal Commission, ii., 15104 *sqq.*

Rhodes, from the Mayor, from the members of the Legislative Assembly in Kimberley, and from Justice Lange, urging that instant relief was necessary to save Kimberley from the "hordes of the enemy," to preserve the lives of the inhabitants, and to avert "terrible disaster," and adding that the Town Guard were worn out with the prolonged strain. More messages in the same tone followed during the next few days. The much-enduring High Commissioner could only reply there was no idea of leaving Kimberley in the lurch, and appealed to Rhodes to keep up the spirits of the inhabitants and not allow a few croakers to demoralise the rest. As a matter of fact there was no demoralisation; and the telegrams, so far from representing the actual situation, simply expressed Rhodes's impatience and his determination to goad the military out of what he conceived to be their paralysis of timidity and inaction. In a last telegram on the 10th Rhodes returned to the charge, dwelling at length on what constituted the real difficulty in the defence of Kimberley, the presence of a large non-combatant population which had not been able to get away in time, as at Ladysmith, and to some extent even at Mafeking.

Discussion of Rhodes's conduct.

With the experience of the war behind us, and with a knowledge of all the dangers and difficulties of the situation at every point of the British front during these weeks, the temptation is to condemn Rhodes's attitude without qualification as mischievous and hysterical. Yet Rhodes's courage, and the depth and intensity of his patriotism, are beyond all question. What then is the explanation? It is, in the main, this, that Rhodes, like all his countrymen from highest to lowest, knew nothing of war and the nature and necessities of military operations; he shared the opinion, held alike by the man in the street and by the minister in the cabinet, as to the relative military effectiveness of British regulars and unorganised Boers; his isolation prevented as rapid an adjustment of preconceived notions to facts in his case as in that of those who remained outside. We must remember that before the war the despatch of an army corps to reduce the Boers was universally regarded as a measure of security only comparable to the employment of a steam hammer to

crack a nut; that no one would have doubted the possibility of a thousand regulars marching from Orange River to Kimberley in the face of only equal numbers of Boers. The hesitations and blunders of British commanders in the opening phase of the war have been criticised freely and fully in previous volumes. But the difficulties of their situation, the inadequacy of the instrument with which they worked, have also been made clear. To most Englishmen at the time the former factor alone stood out. In those early days the one cry was the incompetence and stupidity of the leaders, their alternate timidity and recklessness. Against them and against the army as a whole the bitterness of richly-deserved national disappointment was diverted in a resentment akin in its essential character, if not in its manifestation, to the "*nous sommes trahis*" mania of the French in the not dissimilar circumstances of 1870. In the failure to relieve Kimberley at once with forces whose utter inadequacy it is easy enough for us to recognise now, Rhodes saw nothing but military cowardice and want of imagination. With each delay, with each check, his contempt of the army grew and expressed itself more freely. It is a commonplace that personal insults provoke far less resentment than insults to one's race or profession. To Kekewich and his staff, contemptuous as they must have been of Rhodes's extraordinary notions of what was possible for regulars, and of his state of agitation about Kimberley, and convinced of the mischievousness of his action, Rhodes's attitude to their profession was profoundly galling. Rhodes on his side regarded them as mere advocates and defenders of their incompetent superiors, far more anxious to stand well with them than to avert the disaster of the fall of Kimberley, and incapable of appreciating the efforts or the sufferings of the citizens on whose shoulders the brunt of the defence fell. It was in this mutual contempt and want of comprehension that the real source of friction lay, and not in any disagreement as to the methods of conducting the defence or, indeed, as to its being prolonged to the utmost. Only the most remarkable tact and comprehension could have bridged over such a gulf. Of these qualities Rhodes displayed but little.

Kekewich and his staff were neither inconsiderate nor intolerant; still they were soldiers and not trained diplomatists.

No general friction.

It must not be supposed, however, that there was any general friction between the civilian defenders of Kimberley and the regular forces. On the contrary, the relations between Kekewich and the citizens generally, and between Rhodes and the majority of the regular officers, were all that could be desired; citizens and soldiers co-operated with cheerfulness and mutual loyalty in the task of the defence. The friction was confined to a very small number; its very existence only leaked out by degrees; its real cause and nature were never made public; it never led to any serious consequences. That the subject has been discussed here so fully is due, not to any wish to rake up personal issues or to impute blame to a great Englishman, but solely to the desire to bring out what must be the almost inevitable result of a system under which our statesmen grow up entirely ignorant of the nature and meaning of war, and of the constitution and capacity of their own army.

First tidings of relief.

There is no reason to suppose that Rhodes's anxiety for relief seriously prejudiced Sir R. Buller's plans. The reasons which decided him to send up Lord Methuen with a relieving force, pending the possibility of resuming the original plan of campaign, the preparations made and the actual history of Methuen's march have been fully discussed in their place.* On November 21 parties of the enemy were observed to be moving southwards, and on the 23rd the garrison received their first message from Methuen's force. This message, dated November 18, ran:—"General leaves here with small force on November 21, and will arrive Kimberley on 27th unless detained at Modder River." Acting on this cheering information, which was the first indication of an effort being made to relieve the garrison, Colonel Kekewich determined to undertake a sortie on a larger scale than hitherto, in the hope that he might by a show of activity contain the investing force round him, and thus prevent them from detaching any force to help the troops opposing Methuen.

* See vol. ii., 287, 291, 320 *sqq.*

Nov. 25. Sortie to Carter's Ridge.

With this object Colonel Scott-Turner was ordered to take out his mounted men on the morning of November 25 and operate against Carter's Ridge, where the enemy were known to be constructing gun positions, from the direction of Otto's Kopje. To mask the real objective Colonel Chamier was to take a mixed force 900 strong and demonstrate in the direction of Wimbledon. At 4.30 A.M. on the 25th the two columns sallied out. It was a misty morning, and Scott-Turner's force was able to reach within striking distance of Carter's Ridge without disturbing the enemy; the surprise was so complete that, at the Lazaretto, Lieutenant Clifford's scouts dropped upon a Boer outpost of six men asleep and captured them. Just before Scott-Turner's men reached the foot of Carter's Ridge Chamier's guns came into action against the Boers, whom they had found occupying Johnstone's Kopje, and also engaged in an artillery duel with the enemy's guns on Wimbledon Ridge. Scott-Turner then dismounted his two squadrons of Cape Police and ordered them to extend and advance upon Carter's Ridge. Almost immediately the Boers, who belonged to the Bloemhof commando, opened fire, exposing themselves somewhat in their desire to ascertain the nature of the attack developing against them. As the post did not seem to be held by more than 50 men, Scott-Turner determined to rush it. To do this he dismounted a further portion of his force, using the Kimberley Light Horse, and giving the order to fix bayonets, personally led the charge. The disconcerted burghers opened an erratic and ineffectual fire, and then surrendered; and Scott-Turner found himself in the possession of the work with 9 wounded and 24 unwounded prisoners. Just below the ridge, 800 yards west of it, was the Bloemhof laager, into which Major Scott, V.C., with the rest of the mounted troops, penetrated. General Du Toit, who was at the moment commanding at Kamfersdam, immediately despatched 100 men from the Wolmaransstad laager to support the Bloemhof burghers. They advanced through the scrub and opened fire on the sortie party just as the Carter's Ridge position had been carried. Scott-Turner's orders had not instructed him to hold the ridge, and, at 7 A.M., as he found the mist

prevented him from receiving signal messages from Kekewich in the conning-tower, he decided to fall back on Kimberley. This he was able to do without further loss. Kekewich, seeing that Scott-Turner was retiring, ordered Chamier to follow suit. This he did under cover of his guns with the loss of only two men wounded. The total casualties which the garrison suffered were 6 non-commissioned officers and men killed, 4 officers and 25 men wounded. The wounded officers were Colonel Scott-Turner and Captain Rush slightly, and Captains H. J. Bowen and H. Mahony severely wounded. The Boers reported their loss, apart from prisoners, as 11 killed and 18 wounded. It was a brilliant little success.

Plan for demonstration on Nov. 28.

On the evening of the 27th the first searchlight signals showed Kekewich that Methuen was nearing Modder River; at the same time the southward movement of the Boers became more pronounced. To keep them concentrated round Kimberley, Kekewich decided on a strong demonstration next day. This time there was to be no attempt at surprise. On the contrary the chief object was to draw the attention of the Boers as much as possible. The force was to move out in three columns. The centre column under Chamier, consisting of the North Lancashires, two companies of the Kimberley Regiment, a squadron of Kimberley Light Horse, a detachment of Sappers, four Maxims, and the whole of the mobile artillery, some 900 men in all, was to move out on Johnstone's Kopje in order to threaten Wimbledon Ridge. Major Fraser, with some 300 of the Kimberley and Beaconsfield Town Guards, was to advance on the left. Scott-Turner, with 650 mounted men, was to move out in the direction of Carter's Ridge on the right. The Otto's Kopje garrison was to join in on the right, its place being temporarily taken by the Town Guards. The idea was for the force to demonstrate till dark, and then bivouac in front of the enemy in order to keep him in his positions. No vigorous attack was intended; and Kekewich specially cautioned Scott-Turner against pushing too far. Kekewich, posting himself at the small look-out tower at the Reservoir, retained the general directions in his own hands, but instructed Scott-Turner to consult Chamier as his senior.

Operation opens successfully.

About 2 P.M. the columns moved out. Sending on his handful of mounted men, Chamier seized Johnstone's Kopje with little opposition. A company was detached to occupy Wright's Farm, while Lieutenant Webster's armoured train engaged the Boer guns at Spitzkop, at the southern end of Wimbledon Ridge. Scott-Turner meanwhile, at Chamier's suggestion, and covered by his artillery fire, seized Carter's Farm. Sending a company of the North Lancashires and some sappers, followed subsequently by two guns and by his mounted squadron under Major Peakman, across to support him, Chamier, at 4.45 P.M., reported to Kekewich that he was in a strong position, and intended to remain there for the night. Shortly afterwards he rode back to meet Kekewich at the rendezvous appointed for 6.30 P.M.

Scott-Turner attempts to capture Carter's Ridge.

No further aggressive operations were contemplated either by Kekewich or by Chamier. But Scott-Turner, encouraged by his last success, determined to effect a bold stroke by capturing Carter's Ridge. Sending a squadron of Kimberley Light Horse out towards the Lazaretto to cover his right, he opened his attack on the ridge soon after 5 P.M. Carter's Ridge is a rough excrescence of rock standing up perhaps thirty feet from the plain and extending about a mile and a half from north to south. Along the inner edge the Boers had erected a series of nondescript trenches and sangars. But in the centre of the ridge they had established a gun position. This formed a main work to the whole ridge and possessed sand-bagged and loopholed head cover. All these works had been considerably strengthened since the 25th. The most obvious method of attack for a mounted force was, perhaps, to move right round the rear of the ridge through the gap created by the capture of Carter's Farm. But Scott-Turner, possibly influenced by the success of the tactics he had employed previously, determined to rush the Boer sangars from a flank by a dismounted attack, using each captured work as a stepping-stone to the next. Leaving the infantry and one squadron to hold Carter's Farm and its adjacent buildings, and instructing them to send Major Peakman, who was escorting the artillery, with the remainder of the mounted men to his support as soon as the latter arrived, he collected his men and committed

them to assault. The nearest work was about 1,500 yards distant. Shaking out into extended order, the little party of dismounted troopers advanced into the intervening scrub. Covered by a Maxim, they pushed forward by rapid rushes, and occupied the first schanz, the Boers evacuating it shortly before they reached it. The elated stormers threw themselves into the captured work to catch their breath against the more serious issues to come. In the meantime the Diamond Fields Artillery guns opened on the main redoubt, and another Maxim was brought out from Carter's Farm. A successful side-issue had also taken place on the left of the advance, where Captain Shackleton, with some of the Diamond Fields Horse, had found his way into the Bloemhof laager in rear of the ridge. Reinforced subsequently by a section of the North Lancashires, he completely gutted the laager and destroyed a quantity of live shell. But this incident, by prematurely diverting a portion of the troops from the real objective, may possibly have prejudiced the main attack.

Scott-Turner's death: failure of the attack.

Shortly after 6 P.M. Scott-Turner again shook up his now reduced attacking line. The men responded cheerfully, and the second and then the third schanzes were rushed with great *élan*, the enemy retiring as before. The assaulting party had now got within sixty yards of the more solid defences of the main redoubt. Into this most of the Boers had retreated, and from the comparative security of its loopholes they could now assess the weakness of the handful of troopers lying under the scant cover of the trenches they had just rushed. A heavy fire opened upon the attackers at once, and one of its first victims was the gallant Scott-Turner, who received a Martini bullet through his brain as he raised himself upon his elbow to fire. Realizing that Scott-Turner was dead, Lieutenant Clifford, of the North Lancashires, jumped to his feet and called to the men round him to follow in a rush to gain the fort. He was immediately struck down wounded, but a handful of men tried to respond, only to be driven back by the commanding fire. Shortly afterwards Peakman reached the firing line, losing thirteen out of some forty men on the way. He sent back for support to Major Elliot in command of the Cape Police at

the farm. But Elliot, afraid lest the Boers on the west should capture the farm and all the led horses, was unable to spare any, and ordered Peakman to abandon the ridge.

The force is withdrawn to Kimberley.

Meanwhile, neither Kekewich at the Reservoir, nor Chamier, who had returned to the centre, though aware that heavy fighting had been going on at Carter's Ridge, could get any precise information of what had taken place. It was not till late at night that Kekewich learnt the result of the fight. Considering it useless to run further risks, he sent orders to Peakman, whom he now appointed to command the mounted troops, to fall back on Chamier, and to Chamier to retire on Kimberley at daylight. Before these orders arrived Elliot had already, on his own initiative, ordered a direct retirement of the mounted troops to Kimberley. Chamier withdrew under cover of the guns in the morning. Two officers (Lieutenant-Colonel Scott-Turner and Lieutenant Wright, K.L.H.) and 20 men killed, and three officers (Lieutenant Clifford, L.N.L., Captain Waldek, D.F.H., Lieutenant Watson, K.L.H.) and 28 men wounded was the cost of this abortive enterprise. Scott-Turner's death was an irreparable loss to the defence, which he had done so much to promote, not only by his boldness and enterprise in the field, but also by his energy in organisation and his great hold over the affections of the citizens from Mr. Rhodes downwards.

The question of removing the civilians.

December opened with the cloud of war still overshadowing Kimberley. The wavering beam of light from the south, telling of Methuen's whereabouts, of the success at the Modder, and of the near prospect of relief, lined that cloud with a silver streak. But the searchlight messages conveyed tidings that were far from acceptable to the citizens, and sowed the seeds of increasing discord between Rhodes and the military authorities. Methuen's march on Kimberley was avowedly conceived as a temporary side operation, pending the extrication of White from his difficulties in Natal; as soon as the troops diverted to Natal could be brought back, Methuen was also to return to his proper place ready to resume the original plan for the advance of the Army Corps.* This is not the place to discuss Sir R.

* See vol. ii., 118, 282 *sqq.*

Buller's strategy. All that is necessary to bring out here is that it looked, rightly enough, to the main advance on Bloemfontein as the only permanent and certain means of relieving Kimberley, and that Methuen's march was simply intended to relieve the strain, and to put Kimberley into a position to hold out till the main advance could make its effect felt. In his earlier telegrams Rhodes had dwelt on the enormous difficulty created by the presence of a large civilian population. It seemed to Buller an obvious remedy that the opportunity of the temporary relief should be utilised, not only to strengthen the garrison and bring in fresh supplies, but also to bring away all the population not essential to the defence or to the working of the mines.

Protests of De Beers directors.

On December 5 Kekewich, on receipt of full instructions from Methuen, called together the Mayor and other leading citizens to form a committee to organise the removals. Kekewich's idea was to remove 8,000 of the white inhabitants and 12,000 natives. The news that the long-expected relief was to mean nothing more than a reprovisioning, the addition of a few more regulars, and the banishment of a large proportion of the population from their homes and occupations to endure the discomforts and expense of refugee life at Cape Town, while the rest were to resume the privations and dangers of a second siege, appalled them. To Rhodes and the De Beers directors the further information that they were not very likely to get the coal, dynamite, and provisions necessary for resuming work on the mines and feeding the natives in the compounds was no less disappointing. On the 7th Rhodes had a message flashed to Milner pointing out that in that case De Beers must close down and the military be responsible for the support of the white and native population thrown out of employment and deprived of their wages. He also protested against the proposed addition to the garrison as quite inadequate * and asked the Governor to sanction the raising of a corps of 2,000 volunteers in the colony for the defence of Kimberley, De Beers undertaking

* The original suggestion was for the rest of the North Lancashires and the Naval Brigade. This was amended on December 8 by the addition of another battalion.

to pay all expenses.* On the 8th Rhodes addressed a meeting of the De Beers board and informed them of the intended policy of the authorities, pointed out that it meant expelling 20,000 people or even 35,000 people if, as seemed probable, De Beers were compelled to shut down, and declared that it was the duty of the military authorities to protect Kimberley and keep open communications, and that they had no justification for "jumping in and out." The Board in consequence addressed a letter of protest to Kekewich and followed it up by another on the 13th. The gist of their contentions was that it would be much easier to bring in supplies than to take out the population, and that the first duty of the Government was to protect the lives and property of Her Majesty's subjects, which was perfectly possible provided an "adequate" garrison was left in Kimberley and "reasonable" posts stationed on the line to maintain the communications. As to the rumours of an intention to relieve Kimberley indirectly by an advance into the Free State, they delivered themselves of the following amazing sentiment:—

"Surely the first consideration of the military authorities should be the restoration of the Queen's authority in her own dominions, and the release of her subjects from the violence and assaults of her enemies in her own territories before undertaking offensive expeditions into the neighbouring Republics."

The unfortunate Kekewich had to bear all the brunt of the unpopularity of a policy for which he was by no means responsible, and his position was not made easier by messages from Methuen telling him not to let Rhodes interfere, and intimating that Rhodes would be among the first to be deported. However the preparations for the evacuation went on, and Rhodes himself, bowing to the inevitable and ever anxious for the welfare of the inhabitants, made arrangements for camping and feeding a whole army of

* The more obvious suggestion of asking for a few thousand more rifles and extra horses, in order to augment the local forces, does not seem to have occurred to any one.

Kimberley refugees on his estate at Groote Schuur near Cape Town.

Events in December.

The news of Magersfontein, which reached Kekewich on December 15, put an end, for the time being, to all controversy as to what should be done after the relief of Kimberley. Kekewich was informed that he might be required to hold out till the end of February, and formed his plans accordingly. Resources alike of supplies and of fighting strength had to be husbanded. Not that he contemplated inaction. In spite of the unfortunate issue to the Carter's Ridge enterprise, Kekewich did not depart from his policy of military activity, though he never sanctioned again so bold and comprehensive a sortie as that of November 28. The enemy were constantly disturbed, and certain outposts more advanced from the main perimeter were occupied. Reconnaissances were repeatedly pushed out in the direction of Carter's Farm, Susannah, and elsewhere, by Colonel Peakman, who showed himself a worthy successor of the ill-fated Scott-Turner. Thus December passed with little variation in the monotony of the investment. The Boers maintained their erratic bombardment. They succeeded in doing some damage and caused a slight loss of life; but as with Ladysmith, the Boer gunners preferred the wider mark of the town as the object of their shell-fire to a systematic concentration of fire upon any individual redoubt or work.

Events in January.

The new year opened without any immediate prospects of improvement in the situation. Early in the year the Boers showed some little activity in the direction of Webster's Farm, and on January 9 re-occupied and strengthened Carter's Ridge, which they had abandoned after November 28. On January 10 the intensity of the shell-fire somewhat increased, and it seemed as if the Boers had received some further impetus, or as if the arrival of Lord Roberts had impressed them with the necessity of accelerating the reduction of the town. About the middle of the month heliographic communication was obtained with Lord Methuen's force at a transmitting station at Enslin. Up to this Kimberley's only communication with the outer world had been by search-light flashed against the clouds at night or by

occasional runners who managed to slip through the Boer lines.*

The making of "Long Cecil."

January 19 was a great day in Kimberley. Towards the end of December Mr. Labram had suggested that he should attempt to make a piece of ordnance of a calibre calculated to cope with the Boer guns on better terms than the 7-pounders of the garrison. He believed that the De Beers workshops could produce such a piece, and the work was immediately put in hand. On January 19 the De Beers workmen had completed their task and had turned out a 28-pounder breach-loading rifled gun, which was at once named "Long Cecil" in honour of Mr. Rhodes. This gun underwent its trials satisfactorily, and on the following day was mounted on a special emplacement near No. 2 Search-light Redoubt whence it came into action against the Boer works at the Intermediate Pumping Station. During the first few days it occasionally broke down, but the defects were speedily remedied, and it remained in action to the end of the siege. The production of this gun must be considered one of the most remarkable events in the history of beleaguered garrisons. It was designed and constructed by engineers who had no previous experience of ordnance manufacture, without special plant or arrangements, upon designs adapted from descriptions found in a stray copy of an engineering journal. Its construction from the day that the designs were fashioned took twenty-four days, and on the twenty-fifth day it was in action against the enemy. Truly a feat of which any mechanical establishment might be proud. Altogether it fired 225 shells against the Boers, and it stands in Kimberley to-day as a crowning tribute to the services which De Beers rendered in the defence of their city.

Measures regarding supplies.

The most vital issue, however, during all this period was that of supplies. On December 6, though relief seemed

* Mr. Rhodes kept a certain number of runners and native scouts of his own, who went out with messages and also managed to get into the Boer laagers and bring back news as to movements on the Boer side. The friction between Rhodes and the military staff, which was especially acute where Major O'Meara was concerned, prevented any really effective co-operation between this private messenger and intelligence service and the official one.

imminent, Kekewich had sanctioned the erection of a cold storage by the ever-resourceful Labram, and some 100 cattle were slaughtered and stored away. The scale of rations was reduced from time to time. During most of December the meat ration stood at ½ lb. and the bread ration at 10 oz. for adults. On December 27 the Supply Committee took over all groceries, etc., as well as breadstuffs, and from this date dealers were only allowed to sell against permits issued to individuals by special clerks belonging to the ward in which they lived, and could themselves only secure a fresh supply of stores from the depots by producing a complete statement of their sales in the past week with the permits attached. An effective control was thus established, while the ordinary mechanism of retail distribution was not interfered with. In the native locations, however, the Supply Committee set up its own stores and retailed directly. On January 2 the meat ration was reduced to ¼ lb. for adults and 2 oz. for children. On the following day the Supply Committee took the whole business of slaughtering and selling meat into its own hands. On January 8 the ration included horseflesh for the first time, and from that date till the end of the siege some 600 horses were slaughtered. In view of the aversion felt by many people against horseflesh, and of the effect upon the weaker portion of the population of the scanty and ill-assorted siege fare, a soup-kitchen was started, on the initiative of Captain Tyson, and soup issued in lieu of the meat ration. Mr. Rhodes threw himself warmly into this, as into every plan for alleviating the hardships suffered by the people of Kimberley, and contributed all the vegetables from his gardens. The soup-kitchen, under the direction of Captain Tyson and Dr. Smartt, M.L.A., proved a great success, and as many as 16,000 pints are said to have been issued in a day.

Increase of sickness.

But, although every precaution was taken to fend off sickness, the reduced rations and the mental strain incidental to the investment could not fail to have their effect, and towards the end of January the sick rate increased rapidly. Kimberley, with its large population, could not hope to escape the scourge of enteric and dysentery. The worst

ravages, however, at least among the natives, were caused by scurvy due to the lack of vegetable food. The lack of milk, too, was responsible for the heavy infantile mortality which, in December, rose as high as 671 per thousand for white children, and 912 for native children. A milk depot was started at the suggestion of Mr. E. A. Judge, the Civil Commissioner, and a committee consisting, besides Mr. Judge, mainly of doctors, collected all available milk and issued it to children and invalids against medical certificates.

Boer dispositions. Their inactivity.

Very little has been said, so far, of the siege from the Boer point of view, and indeed there is little to tell. The investing force, after the departure of De la Rey to meet Methuen's advance, and the withdrawal of further detachments before Magersfontein, varied between 4,000 and 5,000 men. The bulk of these were Free Staters, comprising the whole or parts of the Boshof, Hoopstad, Kroonstad, Winburg, Jacobsdal, and Bloemfontein commandos. They held the whole eastern and southern two-thirds of the perimeter, from in front of Dronfield round to Wimbledon. The head laager was at Oliphantsfontein. At the end of the year, according to the Free State custom, a new election for head commandant was held, and Wessels was succeeded by Ferreira, who afterwards met his fate at Paardeberg.* The Transvaalers, mainly belonging to the Lichtenburg and Wolmaransstad commandos, were under Commandant Du Toit. A small detachment of Griqualand rebels, under Van Aswegen, were camped at Dronfield Ridge.† Even more than the investments of Ladysmith and Mafeking, that of Kimberley resembled a great picnic. No attempt whatever was made to get into close quarters at any point, and desultory shelling at the extreme ranges of their guns was the only offensive action the besiegers indulged in. How far the fear of the mines scattered round Kimberley was a real deterrent or a mere excuse for keeping beyond the range of rifle bullets it is impossible to determine.

Feb. 7. "Long Tom" opens fire.

From this lethargy the sudden manifestation of "Long Cecil's" powers, coupled with the rumours of Lord Roberts's intention to relieve Kimberley, first aroused the Boers. A

* See vol. iii., p. 473. † See vol. iii., p. 411.

request was sent to Pretoria for a big gun, and the "Long Tom," blown up at Gun Hill,* and since repaired, was sent down under the personal supervision of M. Leon, Creusot's representative. With it at the same time came Colonel de Villebois Mareuil,† intent on stirring up the Boers to more soldier-like activity. On February 6 the "Long Tom" arrived, and was mounted on the Kamfersdam tailing heap. Towards noon on the 7th the great gun opened on the city and on Otto's Kopje. De Villebois Mareuil's idea was to follow up the moral effect of a really heavy bombardment by seizing Otto's Kopje the same evening with a small force, and from there proceeding to a subsequent attack on the town. But to his intense disgust he found that the gunners, accustomed to an afternoon nap, had ceased fire on the pretext of some slight unevenness of the gun platform, and the attack was put off, and again put off on various trivial pretexts on the next day and the days after. Meanwhile the garrison of Kimberley showed themselves by no means disposed to submit patiently to the bombardment. "Long Cecil" had replied with vigour, and had more than once driven the Boer gunners from the platform, on one occasion wounding seven men. Trenches were pushed forward across the open, and a heavy rifle fire kept up on Kamfersdam. It was from these trenches that Leon, on the 12th, received a bullet through eye and brain, from which he, however, successfully recovered. Altogether, from the Boer point of view, "Long Tom" had not apparently produced much effect.

Consternation in Kimberley. Renewed friction.

But it was very different inside Kimberley. For the first time in the siege the bombardment seemed likely to create genuine panic. The loss of life was not great, though, by a cruel irony of fate, one of the first victims of this new terror was Mr. Labram, whose genius in creating "Long Cecil" had provoked the Boers to take this form of reprisal. But the moral effect produced by the bursting of the huge 96-lb. shells was a very different matter. Consternation was increased when the Boers suddenly opened on the night of the 9th. Other causes contributed to disturb the mind

* See vol. iii., p. 168. † See p. 212.

of the citizens. The impenetrable veil of secrecy which Roberts cast over his great concentration had not been lifted for the benefit of any one in Kimberley. The only rumours that reached Kimberley during these days were those intentionally put about of a concentration at Norval's Pont for a march into the Free State. Already at the end of January the leading merchants had importuned Kekewich to give them information as to the intended date of the relief. The idea that no direct relief was in contemplation, and that Kimberley was to submit to the terrors of the bombardment indefinitely, caused the long-pent-up irritation to break out again. On the 9th Rhodes told Kekewich that unless he was fully and definitely informed of the steps being taken for the relief of Kimberley he would, in two days' time, call a public meeting to represent the seriousness of the situation; at the same time he put pressure on the Mayor to have the meeting summoned. On the 10th the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, acting under Rhodes's inspiration, published an article headed "Why Kimberley cannot wait," in which it hysterically denounced the military authorities for not realising the claims of Kimberley upon them. On the same day Rhodes, the Mayor, and other leading citizens waited upon Kekewich in a deputation, and presented a message for transmission to Lord Roberts in which they respectfully desired to be informed if there was any intention on his part of making an immediate effort for the relief of Kimberley, and, after dwelling on the hardships endured by the people of Kimberley, concluded by declaring that immediate relief was essential.

No intention of surrender.

The object of Rhodes and those who acted with him was undoubtedly simply that of getting some sort of information and of using all their influence to hasten the relief. Kept in the dark as they were—in some respects, possibly, to a greater degree than was absolutely necessary—and feeling that their point of view was not shared by Kekewich, to whom, as it seemed to them, the fall or starvation of Kimberley meant little if he carried out his instructions, their chief idea was to make sufficient disturbance to compel attention. That they contemplated forcing Kekewich to surrender is out of the

question. Whatever may be thought of the judgment displayed by them, their patriotism was undoubted. Unfortunately the strain of the siege and the prolonged friction with Rhodes seems to have told on the nerves of Kekewich and his staff too, and to have warped their judgment where Rhodes was concerned. Already, on the 8th, Kekewich had reported the situation as serious, "having regard to the population and the class of troops defending the town"; on the 9th he signalled that he feared that it would be "very difficult to resist the pressure of a large section of the public many more days," and in a further message added that he feared he would have great difficulty in restraining Rhodes from precipitating matters, and expressing doubts of his power to stop the threatened meeting taking place.

Lord Roberts's exhortations.

Lord Roberts, on the receipt of Kekewich's first message, had replied telling him to "reassure the inhabitants, many days cannot now elapse before your long-looked-for relief will be effected." On the 10th, after seeing Kekewich's messages of the preceding day, he sent a strongly-worded message to him to "represent to the Mayor and Mr. Rhodes as strongly as you possibly can the disastrous and humiliating effect of surrendering after so prolonged and glorious a defence," and adding that many days could not possibly pass before Kimberley was relieved, as operations would begin on the morrow. At the same time he authorised Kekewich to make the fullest use of his authority to forbid a meeting or arrest Rhodes. As a matter of fact Roberts's first message was all that Rhodes and his associates ever wanted. To the second Rhodes replied at once that they had never "thought or spoken of surrendering." *

Women and children take refuge in the mines.

Meanwhile the bombardment continued. On Sunday the 11th Rhodes requested Mr. Gardner Williams, the general manager of De Beers, to get the mines ready to receive any one who cared to take refuge there. Notices were placarded round the town, and by nightfall some 3,000 women and children had gone down the Kimberley and De Beers mines. Here they remained in safety and comparative comfort some 1,200 feet below the surface till Kimberley was relieved.

* See vol. iii., p. 368.

Feb. 15. Relief of Kimberley.

During the next few days considerable movement was observed in the Boer positions, and it was generally realised that Lord Roberts's advance had commenced in earnest. On the morning of February 14 natives brought to Major Fraser, commanding at Beaconsfield, the news that the Boers had evacuated Alexandersfontein in order to reinforce their positions on the Modder.* Major Fraser, with commendable enterprise, at once moved out and occupied the Boer trenches. But although on February 15 relief was imminent, yet neither the garrison nor the Boers knew how imminent it was. The 6-inch gun opened with its usual confidence from Kamfersdam, and a heavy shell-fire from the guns on Wimbledon Ridge and Susannah was kept up on the detachment holding Alexandersfontein, in which the defenders had several casualties. Then about 3 P.M. Major Fraser reported from Beaconsfield that a heliograph could be seen working about 15 miles S.E. of Kimberley. This was immediately followed by an urgent message from Captain O'Brien, commanding the newly acquired post at Alexandersfontein, stating that a large body of mounted troops was advancing across the flats towards him, and asking for reinforcements. At 4 o'clock Colonel Kekewich received a heliogram from General French himself intimating that he was advancing to the relief of Kimberley. Shortly afterwards a patrol of Australian Horse rode into the town.

Conclusion.

Thus ended the four months' siege of Kimberley. As a military operation it calls for little comment, except just this, that it was in the main a civilian defence. How far the citizens of Kimberley would have been able to resist the attack of a really determined enemy is a matter for speculation. Certain it is that the credit of what was accomplished, the keeping of the Boers at arm's length and the safeguarding of a city whose fall would have had the most disastrous consequences throughout South Africa, belongs in the main to them. Of Colonel Kekewich, as a commander, no more need be said than that he did all that could be expected. He made a free but not rash use of his small active force, and throughout confined the Boers to a

* See vol. iii., p. 390.

DIRECTIONS

British

Boers

1 Head Quarters

△△△ Boer Laagers

Guns

Attacks & Counter Attacks

SIEGE OF KIMBERLEY

OCT. 15TH 1899 - FEB. 15TH 1900

SCALE

1000 2000 3000 4000 Yards

1 2 3 Miles

CONTOURS 30ft V.I.

Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London

defensive *rôle*. His staff and subordinates, regular and improvised, supported him with loyalty and ability. Of the unfortunate friction that arose between him and Mr. Rhodes enough has been said already. Whatever may be the judgment that the military critic may pass on Rhodes's conduct at certain critical moments, in the minds of the citizens of Kimberley the memory of his share in the siege will remain a memory of danger endured in common, of helpful endeavour, of constant solicitude for the welfare of the city and the people which were so peculiarly his own.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SIEGE OF MAFEKING

General appearance of Mafeking.

MAFEKING,* the most northerly town in Cape Colony, has little to distinguish it from countless other trading settlements and villages in South Africa. It consists of a railway station and the usual straggling collection of low mud-built houses and stores roofed with corrugated iron, while half a mile to the south-west on either bank of the Molopo River, flowing east to west, lie thickly clustered the round huts of a Kaffir stad. So much are houses and huts the colour of their natural surroundings, that, except when quite close, only an eye well accustomed to South African scenes could distinguish village from veld. This is the more remarkable since the veld here is almost unbroken, save for the river's deep channel and some trifling undulations of 100 to 150 feet on its southern bank, and to the west of the town. The hard, rocky surface of the ground, which sends forth only some thin grass and stunted shrubs, is well indicated by the name Mafeking, in native language the "Place of Stones."

Its previous history.

But in spite of this unpromising aspect, Mafeking itself and the surrounding country have been from very early days in the history of the Transvaal a subject of contention. In 1852, the very year of the Sand River Convention, the Boer farmers had begun raiding the territory of the Bechuana chiefs on their western border, where they came into collision with Montsioa's tribe of Barolongs, whose headquarters

* Previous references to Mafeking and to the first days of the siege will be found in vol. i., pp. 78, 79, and vol. ii., pp. 131–135, 266–270, 298. For convenience the story will be treated as a whole in this chapter, at the risk of some repetition.

were at Mafeking. Border forays continued till 1868, when President Pretorius thought to have settled the questions at issue by proclaiming the whole of Bechuanaland as far west as Lake N'Gami to be within the territory of the Transvaal. Montsioa consistently but fruitlessly appealed for British protection, until in 1871 the Keate award definitely declared Mafeking to be outside the limits of the Transvaal and within Great Britain's sphere of influence. Although the burghers never acknowledged the justice of this award, there was no more serious trouble till after the Transvaal had regained its independence by the Convention of 1881. In that year quarrels among the tribes gave an opportunity to freebooters, both Boer and British, to assist various chiefs on the promise of farms for themselves. The British freebooters were warned off by a proclamation of the High Commissioner; but the Boer adventurers, less scrupulously kept in check, formed the two independent republics of Stellaland at Vryburg and Goshen at Rooigrond, which is on the borders of the Transvaal and Bechuanaland, and only six miles from Mafeking. Montsioa's cattle and his land, being naturally an object of desire to the republicans of Goshen, were the cause of several bloody conflicts. Finally, the attention of the Imperial Government was drawn to the matter in 1884 by President Kruger's proclamation annexing the disputed territory to the republic in direct violation of the Convention of London. On the High Commissioner's remonstrance the proclamation was withdrawn, and in 1885 Sir Charles Warren's expedition * put an end to the republic of Goshen. Sir Charles proclaimed the whole of Bechuanaland to be a British protectorate, dug wells and built forts at Mafeking, and laid out the present European town as the seat of the Resident Commissioner. Mafeking from that time became an important settlement. It was the starting-point for hunting expeditions into the Kalahari desert, and a busy place for traders, who exchanged manufactured goods for cattle or the

* The late Sir George Baden-Powell, brother of the defender of Mafeking, accompanied Sir Charles Warren on this expedition in a political capacity.

skins of wild beasts with the natives and the Boer farmers over the border. In 1894 it became connected by railway with Vryburg and Kimberley, and in 1896 was the base from which General Carrington's troops started to suppress the Matabele rebellion. The year before Mafeking with the rest of Bechuanaland south of the Molopo had been handed over to the Cape by the Imperial Government, a transference of authority which enabled Dr. Jameson to prepare for his raid in comparative secrecy. In 1897 the railway was extended to Buluwayo from Mafeking. The town thereby lost its importance as a terminus, but owing to its favourable position on the border always remained a thriving commercial centre and a considerable railway depot.

Oct. 1899. Anxiety of the Boers to capture Mafeking. Commandos under Cronje gather round the town.

The previous history of Mafeking accounts, therefore, for the importance attached by the Transvaal Boers to its possession. Those on the western border had never ceased to feel a sense of grievance that it was not theirs, while the whole nation, since the Jameson raid, regarded it with apprehension in the hands of the English as a convenient starting-point for an expeditionary force against their capital. Accordingly, when war seemed imminent in the early days of October, one of the largest forces put into the field by the Boers assembled at various camps on the border close to Mafeking. According to a Boer account this force numbered between 9,000 and 11,000, and was composed of the Marico, Lichtenburg, Rustenburg, Potchefstroom and Wolmaransstad commandos. Its commander was Piet Cronje, considered their boldest general by the more warlike spirits among the Boers, and under him were De la Rey, J. P. Snyman and Hans Botha. This force crossed the border as soon as war was declared, and after cutting the line north and south of Mafeking proceeded to close round the town.

A small British force sent to occupy it only at the last moment.

Only at the last moment had a small British force been thrown into Mafeking. Colonel Baden-Powell had been sent in July with a few other special service officers to raise two regiments of mounted men for service on the western border.* Colonel Plumer's Rhodesian Regiment, based on Tuli, was one of these,† the other, called the Protectorate Regiment,

* See vol. ii., p. 101.

† See chap. vi., pp. 198–202.

recruited from the same sources as Plumer's, was under Lieut.-Colonel Hore. Owing to the unwillingness of the Cape Government to allow any appearance of military demonstrations, this regiment was not at first concentrated at Mafeking, but eighteen miles further north at Ramathlabama, the border station of the Imperial Protectorate. However, Colonel Baden-Powell, whose general instructions had been to protect the borders of Bechuanaland and Rhodesia in case of war, and to draw as many Boers as possible away from the south, had from the first realised the importance of holding Mafeking. It was essential to prevent the Boers from acquiring so convenient a base for any designs they might have on Kimberley and Cape Colony or on Rhodesia, all the more as it was well stocked with food and forage and railway material; while its loss would be a considerable blow to British prestige among the native tribes in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Moreover, a British force concentrated here would be useful for any offensive operations which might be contemplated against the weak western flank of the Transvaal. Accordingly, at the end of September, on receiving authority from the High Commissioner, Baden-Powell moved down from Ramathlabama with all the troops he had been able to collect and set about placing Mafeking in a state of defence.

Colonel R. S. S. Baden-Powell's record.

Lieutenant-Colonel R. S. S. Baden-Powell, who commanded the troops at Mafeking during the longest siege in the South African War, was forty-two years old in 1899. Two years previously, after attaining the rank of major in the 13th Hussars, he had been appointed lieutenant-colonel commanding the 5th Dragoon Guards. During his twenty-three years' service he had been employed in India, Afghanistan, Ashanti and South Africa, where, besides being Assistant Military Secretary, he had taken part in operations in Zululand and was chief staff officer to Sir Frederick Carrington during the Matabele campaign. In the course of that war he had been able to make himself well acquainted with the country he was now called upon to defend, since his column started marching up country from Mafeking. A bold rider and a sportsman, he was devoted to his profession, and had shown much originality in his methods of training and

instruction. The uncompromising enemy of hidebound rules and unintelligent drill, he made it his aim to develop initiative and individual responsibility, not only in junior officers but in every man of a regiment, and always laid great stress on the use of observation and intelligence in war.

The men and arms at his disposal.

It certainly needed a man of some originality to organise a successful defence against the odds with which Colonel Baden-Powell found himself confronted. In men he was hopelessly outnumbered by Cronje's 10,000. His trained troops amounted to between 700 and 800, composed of about 470 of the Protectorate Regiment under Colonel Hore (South Staffords), 90 British South Africa Police (Protectorate contingent) under Lieut.-Colonel Walford, 100 Cape Police under Inspectors Marsh and Browne, and 70 Bechuanaland Rifles under Captain Cowan. But, though these troops were few in number, they were well fitted for the work before them The Police and Bechuanaland Rifles were men accustomed to the country and to independent work on the border; the Protectorate Regiment, recruited chiefly from the Cape ports, had been trained during the past two months with great care by Baden-Powell, who, disregarding the text-books, had encouraged the men to work with a consciousness of the country in which they had to fight and of the tricky enemy they would meet, without necessarily waiting for orders in situations requiring prompt decision. Moreover, their officers were mostly picked men who had been sent out with the Colonel in July, numbering among them Major Godley of the Dublin Fusiliers and Captains Lord Charles Bentinck, Marsh, Vernon, and FitzClarence. In addition to the trained troops nearly all the able-bodied white men in Mafeking had been enrolled for service. From the first Baden-Powell had recognised the advantage of actively associating the townspeople in the defence of their own homes, not merely for the sake of their additional numbers, but also in order to enlist their sympathy with his operations; and in this view he was cordially met by the townspeople themselves, headed by their patriotic Mayor, Mr. Whiteley. During September he had sent Lieut.-Colonel Vyvyan of the

MAJOR-GENERAL R. S. S. BADEN-POWELL.

Photo by Elliott & Fry.

Buffs into Mafeking to organise secretly a town guard to take their share in manning the trenches. Nearly every able-bodied man in the town volunteered, so that when Baden-Powell arrived in October he found an additional 400, composed of townspeople, railway men and refugees, ready to shoulder a rifle. Besides this garrison of 1,200 white men, he determined to utilise a certain number of natives. His reason for doing this was that he proposed to include the native stad in his scheme of defence, for otherwise the natives who were under British protection would hardly escape the depredations of a Boer force attacking Mafeking. Accordingly he had between 400 and 500 of them enrolled and armed to serve as cattle guards, watchmen, and scouts, and to help in the defence of their own village; he employed many more in digging trenches and building forts. In his dealings with the natives he was fortunate in obtaining the assistance of Major Hamilton Goold-Adams, the Resident Commissioner of the Protectorate, and of Mr. C. G. H. Bell, the Resident Magistrate and Civil Commissioner, both then stationed at Mafeking. The number of women and children left in the town was about 650, so that with the garrison the total European population was under 2,000. The native stad by the river normally had a population of 6,000, but this had been increased by the influx of nearly 1,000 native refugees from the Johannesburg mines. The rifles available for the white garrison were partly Lee-Metfords and partly Martini-Henrys, while the natives had to content themselves chiefly with Sniders and elephant guns. The artillery under the command of Major Panzera was even more defective than the supply of rifles, for it contained no single modern piece, and consisted of four muzzle-loading 7-pdrs. with a range of 2,500 yards, a 1-pdr. Hotchkiss, a 2-inch Nordenfelt, and seven ·303 Maxims. The total amount of ammunition was somewhere about 500,000 rounds of ·303 ammunition, 60,000 rounds of ·303 Maxim ammunition, 180,000 rounds of M.H. ammunition, 10,000 rounds of Snider, 200 rounds per 7-pdr. gun, 10,000 rounds of Nordenfelt, 150 rounds for the Hotchkiss, and a certain amount of loose powder, consisting of fine and coarse grain, and blasting powder.

Preparations for a siege.

To make up for deficiency in numbers and in artillery Baden-Powell during the first days of October had made full use of the time allowed him for preparations. He had sent down to the Cape all the women and children, amounting to 170, who wished to leave, and had lodged in gaol several Dutchmen suspected of being Boer spies. Gangers were despatched north and south, under the direction of Captain More, the district engineer of the Cape railways, to collect all loose rails and material and bring them in to Mafeking; a defensive line for the use of armoured trains was laid in a north-easterly direction at right angles to the main line; an armoured train was made up of trucks protected by a framework of rails fastened together and of an armoured engine sent up from Kimberley at Baden-Powell's request.* At the same time an elaborate plan was drawn up for the defence of the town and each quarter assigned to definite detachments of the garrison; while every moment during the early days of October, that could be spared from digging trenches and making preparations, was employed in practising the men at attack and defence of the town.

Description of the perimeter defended, and the system of forts and trenches adopted.

When the English settlement of Mafeking was laid out by Sir Charles Warren in 1885 the site was not chosen with any view to military defence, but chiefly on account of the good drainage slope and in order to be sufficiently near Montsioa's stad to allow the native population to take advantage of the traders' stores and, at the same time, to enable Europeans and natives to afford each other mutual support in the event of further trouble with freebooters from the Transvaal. In 1899 it was roughly 1,000 yards square with two open spaces, Government Square and Market Square, in the centre. The only exception to the uniformly one-storeyed houses was the two-storeyed Roman Catholic convent some two hundred yards to the north of the town; near it was the hospital built in 1899 with accommodation for forty patients. On the west lay the railway station with its store sheds and sidings, with the line running through it from north to south. The water supply was derived

* He had asked for two; the second was captured by the Boers at Kraaipan.

from wells dug in Sir Charles Warren's time and from springs 4,300 yards from the north-eastern edge of the town, whence the water was conveyed partly in an open furrow and partly in pipes to the town. Halfway between the town and these springs was the racecourse. The area of defence, measured from the north-eastern corner of the town to the south-western extremity of the stad, was a mile and three-quarters in length; but in spite of his small numbers, Baden-Powell determined to hold a perimeter of seven or eight miles. His furthest point south, over a mile from the town, was an old fort called Cannon Kopje, built by Sir Charles Warren on the rising ground beyond the Molopo River, and commanding the whole of Mafeking; thence the original line of trenches gradually came closer to the town on the east, and, after skirting some brickfields, hugged the north-eastern side of the town, whence it zigzagged round the hospital and convent to Fort Ayr, built on the rising ground nearly two miles to the west; from that point it passed the native stad until it came back to Cannon Kopje. Numerous forts and redoubts were constructed along this line of trenches, and inside them other forts and trenches from which an enemy penetrating the first line would be taken in flank. Between Fort Ayr and the town a laager with bomb-proof shelters and covered ways was constructed for the women and children, and all the inhabitants were advised to provide themselves with similar shelters on their own account. Barricades were piled across the streets to enable the defenders to make a last stand if the assailants reached so far, and mines were laid in the immediate neighbourhood of the town.

Distribution of the garrison.

The distribution of the garrison was as follows. To the Protectorate Regiment was apportioned the duty of defending the western and south-western line of defences, Captain Marsh's squadron being placed in the native village to support the natives in case of necessity, and a squadron held in reserve at the old B.S.A. Police Fort, which was Colonel Hore's own headquarters. Major Godley had entire command of the western portion of the defence. The Barolongs were directed to hold the south-west side, pushing their men

out far enough to cover their cattle when grazing. Cannon Kopje, the key of the position, was assigned to Colonel Walford, with the B.S.A. Police, while Mackenzie's native contingent, called the "Black Watch," and another party of natives filled gaps on his right and left respectively. Inspector Marsh's division of the Cape Police were held in support of this part of the defence line. Inspector Browne's division occupied the south-east corner of the town (Ellis's Corner), and the Bechuanaland Rifles, under Captain Cowan, the north-east, with a reserve in the Town Hall. The Railway division, under Lieutenant More, held the north and north-west front of the town, including the Railway camp. The Town Guard, under Colonel Vyvyan, held the trenches erected immediately round the town itself, the chief points being Hospital Redan on the north, de Kock's, Musson's and Ellitson's Corners on the east, and Dall's, Dixon's, and Early's on the south.

The garrison was indeed small for so wide an area, especially as there were no natural features to assist in the defence of the town. But undoubtedly Baden-Powell was wise in extending his lines far out, for the chief danger was likely to come from the enemy's artillery, which was certain to outrange his miserable old guns, and the further he could push out his riflemen, the less likely were guns to damage the town. Moreover, he to a great extent neutralised the difficulty of communication over so extended an area by having a complete system of telephones connecting his own office in the centre of the town with each fort and post. Every commander was allowed full liberty as to the disposition of his own force and the defence of the quarter assigned to him, but by his admirable system of communication the Colonel was always able to bring reinforcements to bear on any position which was hard pressed or to move about his artillery; and in all arrangements of this nature he was ably seconded by his chief staff officer, Major Lord Edward Cecil.

Good food supply.

But, however well organised for defence a garrison may be, it has little chance of standing a siege if its food runs short. In this respect Mafeking was singularly fortunate. There were a large number of cattle in the town, principally

the property of the natives; for these enough ground for grazing was secured by the wide area of defence. Six weeks' full rations for the men and forage for the horses of the Protectorate Regiment were in store, and large stocks of food were in the possession of the important South African firm of Julius Weil & Co., who had a branch here under the charge of Mr. B. B. Weil, one of the partners. Their stock alone was so considerable that it was valued at £30,000, and the successful defence of Mafeking is no doubt partly due to their forethought. Besides these stores, Mr. Whiteley had a large supply of food, and large consignments on the way to Buluwayo and other up-country towns were found at the station after the line had been cut.

Boers determined not to fail for want of numbers.

Thus Baden-Powell was prepared at all points. The Boers on their side, in spite of their large numbers, were not altogether easy about him. He had already obtained a reputation among them as a bold and original leader, and they had a greater opinion of the colonials, whom they knew he had been training at Ramathlabama, than of the regular soldiers. For that reason they were determined not to let him escape for want of numbers, and in spite of their belief in his ingenuity, felt that with 10,000 men they must be able to overwhelm him and his handful of men in their exposed position.

Oct. 13, 1899. Mafeking cut off.

During the three days preceding the expiry of the ultimatum Cronje's forces were spread along a line of twenty-five miles on the western border next to Mafeking. About noon on the 12th Baden-Powell received information from Maretsani, twenty-four miles south, that a party of armed Boers had crossed the border early that morning and were proceeding in the direction of Kraaipan, doubtless with the intention of trying to overpower the force of Cape Police supposed to be there. In this they were frustrated, as Baden-Powell had called the force into Mafeking on the previous day, but they cut the garrison's telegraphic communication with the south. The following morning native spies told of the appearance of parties of Boers at Ramathlabama, and the telegraph line to Buluwayo was interrupted. From that moment Mafeking was en-

tirely shut off from regular communication with the outside world.

Baden-Powell defends himself by taking the offensive.

But, though Mafeking was now isolated and threatened by greatly superior numbers, Baden-Powell from the first adopted the policy of defending himself by taking the offensive. He had taken every precaution to make himself safe inside Mafeking, but he had no intention of sitting there and allowing himself to be quietly besieged. In his own words, he was determined to show the vitality of the garrison and to mystify his assailants by delivering vigorous "kicks" at them. On the 13th he began by sending out the armoured train to interrupt a party of Boers who were destroying the line four miles to the south; after an exchange of rifle fire the Boers temporarily abandoned their operations. On the same day he unintentionally caused considerable alarm to them by his expedient for getting rid of two truck-loads of dynamite which were discovered at the station. Being apprehensive lest a Boer shell might explode them, he ordered them to be taken well out on the veld to the north of the town and there left. The engine-driver charged with the business, after taking the dynamite some six miles along the line, saw Boers in the distance, whereupon he uncoupled the trucks, gave them a good shunt in their direction, and returned with his engine. The Boers opened a heavy fire on the trucks as they came nearer, which resulted in the explosion of some twenty tons of dynamite. It was afterwards ascertained that the Boers believed this explosion to have been intentional, a belief which by no means diminished their respect for the mines which they knew to have been laid in the immediate neighbourhood of the town.

Oct. 14. FitzClarence's attack on the Boers.

On the 14th Baden-Powell sent out the armoured train under Captain Williams of the B.S.A.P. with about fifty men, two Maxims and the Hotchkiss to punish some Boers who had fired on one of his patrols three miles to the north. After an interchange of heavy firing between the armoured train and the Boers, Baden-Powell despatched the reserve squadron of the Protectorate Regiment, under Captain FitzClarence, in support. The Boers, giving way before FitzClarence's attack, gradually led him too far into bush

country, where they were well protected, while he was out of touch with the train and somewhat exposed. However, a gun sent up under Lieutenant Murchison enabled the squadron to retire on the train with a loss of two killed and sixteen wounded, the Boer loss, according to their own accounts, being only three. On this, the first occasion when the Protectorate Regiment were under fire, they gave ample proof of their good material and of their careful training by steadiness in a difficult position.

Investing lines occupied by the Boers.

So far the Boers had been taking up an attitude of defence rather than of offence. Being unwilling to take any risks in crossing the open ground round the town, they found one of their chief difficulties in attacking to be the absence of commanding positions for their guns and sharpshooters to occupy. However, as there was nothing to prevent an investing line being drawn, they gradually moved their camps as close as possible round the town, taking full advantage of every slight rise in the ground not already occupied by the defenders. By the end of the month Cronje had brought his head laager with the Potchefstroom burghers to Jackal Tree, a low hill marked by a single thorn tree 5,000 yards south of the town and almost in a line with Cannon Kopje; at M'Mullen's Farm, three miles to the east on the Molopo River, Snyman had his own Marico commando besides the men from Wolmaransstad; Signal Hill, three and a half miles to the north-east, was the headquarters of the Rustenburg commando under Steenekamp; and a mile and a half to the north-west, near the railway, Field-cornet Eloff, a grandson of the President, had a detachment in occupation of Game Tree Hill, a slight mound from which stood out a solitary acacia. Another detachment of the Rustenburgers was west of the stad, and smaller laagers and gun positions were dotted about between these main camps. The point where the Boer trenches approached the town most nearly was in the brickfields to the east, where disused kilns and spent clay-pits gave excellent cover for their marksmen. Their artillery was in every way superior to that of the defenders. At first they had two 7 pdrs., one 12 pdr., one 9 pdr. Krupp, two quickfiring 14 pdrs.

and a pom-pom, all fitted with a breech-loading action. They had thus, as they said, "shut up the meercat in his hole."

Oct. 16. The bombardment begins.

On the 16th the Boers opened the bombardment with two guns from Signal Hill. The cannonade was continued till 1 o'clock without eliciting any reply from the garrison, whose guns had a range barely half as great as that of their opponents. The Boers also cut off the water supply from the springs, but this proved a comparatively harmless measure, as the townspeople had previously been warned to fill all their tanks and cisterns, and for the rest of the siege found the supply of water from the wells and the Molopo River ample. Snyman, who was in command of the Boer attack on this day, was puzzled at the garrison making no resistance, and sent in a messenger under a flag of truce to learn the reason and summon the town to surrender, in order, as he said, to stop further bloodshed. The Colonel received this emissary, an Englishman named Everitt, with a polite request that he might be informed when the bloodshed was to begin, as so far only one fowl had been killed. Everitt was detained to lunch and a message sent to Snyman, who was seen to be putting guns into position and intrenching, to say that he was acting contrary to the rules of civilised war in working during a truce. In point of fact only two shots had taken effect, and these had gone into the convent and hospital, which were both flying the red cross flag. The hospital was unfortunately situated and came more under fire than any other part of the town, for the convent next to it, being the only two-storeyed building in Mafeking, made a convenient ranging mark for the Boer gunners.

The trenches and bomb-proof shelters in Mafeking.

After this first day's shelling, except for a few skirmishes on the outposts and some comparatively harmless cannonading by the Boers, there was a week's pause in active hostilities. The garrison employed the time in perfecting their trenches and bomb-proof shelters. The trenches were loopholed according to a special system of Baden-Powell's, who recognised that the regulation four-inch loophole unnecessarily restricted a marksman's vision. Instead of four inches,

therefore, he insisted on loopholes four feet wide, which gave a wide range of fire, and in no way detracted from the man's safety. At first the Colonel had some difficulty in persuading the garrison and townspeople to use the shelters against gun-fire. It was regarded as rather a point of honour not to be seen running underground at the first sound of cannon. But gradually, as it became evident that the Boer shells, though harmless to those underground, were able to inflict damage in the streets and houses, wiser counsels prevailed. Before the end of the siege, besides the carefully made tunnels and passages in the women's laager, almost every house in the town and outlying work had its own shelter. In most cases this consisted of a trench dug some three or four feet wide, five to six feet deep, and sufficiently long to afford room for its occupants to sit side by side. Fortunately the soil was gravelly and the sides of the trenches required little or no support. A roof was provided by means of railway rails, taken from the stock thoughtfully collected before the siege commenced. These were laid across the trench, and above them sheets of galvanized iron, while the whole was covered over with three or four feet of earth. The shelters thus provided were known to be not actually shell-proof from a direct hit, but were quite sufficient to guard against flying splinters or the effects of shrapnel fire. Where possible these bomb-proofs were placed behind the walls of houses with a view to the shells bursting on first contact with the walls, and thus giving no direct blow to the shelters. Throughout the siege look-out men would signal to headquarters the part of the town against which a Boer gun was being trained. A certain number of bells, to correspond with the quarter indicated, would forthwith be rung to prepare the inhabitants, and as soon as the flash of the gun was seen, the final alarm bell would be sounded; this just gave time for the inhabitants of the threatened quarter to take refuge in their shelters before the shell arrived. It was not long before these warning bells had become as much a part of the daily routine in Mafeking as the dinner-bell is to the ordinary citizen.

Oct. 23. The Boers bring up a 94-pdr. Creusot gun.

The Boers during the same period pushed forward their trenches, bringing them within 1,200 yards of the town on the brickfields side. They also obtained reinforcements. On the 21st October the Scandinavian corps arrived at Cronje's laager, bringing with them one of the four great Long Toms, a Creusot breech-loading gun which fired a 94 lb. shell at an extreme range of 10,000 yards.* The day before a letter arrived from Cronje informing the commander of the garrison that he was unable to take Mafeking without bombardment, which would commence at 6 A.M. on October 23. A suitable reply was sent, and, in return for his courteous warning of the proposed bombardment, Cronje was informed that dynamite mines had been laid round the town; a notice was issued to the inhabitants recommending them to make arrangements "to spend the day underground on Monday, with a supply of food and literature," in case the threat should come true. On the day appointed the monster gun duly opened fire, but although the noise of the shells was alarming and their effect on the mud walls destructive, their only serious result was that one man and one horse were slightly wounded, and once more the death of a chicken was reported from the garrison poultry-yard. In some ways the Scandinavians proved more useful than the big gun, for they showed great activity and succeeded in discovering and rendering innocuous a large number of the mines which had been laid down on the outskirts of the town.

Oct. 25–Nov. 7. Attacks and counter-attacks.

The fortnight succeeding the first bombardment by the 94-pdr. was the most exciting period of the siege, for the Boers made two fairly determined attempts to storm the place, and Baden-Powell answered by surprise attacks on their advanced trenches. On the 25th Cronje opened fire in the early morning from seven of his guns, and sent forward parties of his men to make simultaneous attacks on the Barolong stad to the south-west and on the north-east. The garrison made no reply to the Boer artillery, and reserved their fire until the attacking parties were within rifle-range.

* This gun became familiarly known to the garrison as "Big Ben." Another smaller gun of the Boers was given the name of "Gentle Annie."

The Boers had expected little resistance from the Barolongs and intended the attack on that quarter as a feint to cover a more serious assault on the north-east. But when they found the natives quite prepared to repel them and Captain Marsh's squadron of the Protectorate Regiment also intrenched there, they gave up the undertaking before they had time to develop the attack on the other side. Two nights later Baden-Powell followed up his success by a sally against an advanced trench of the Marico laager on the racecourse, which, being only 2000 yards away, gave considerable annoyance to the townspeople. Captain Fitz-Clarence and fifty-five men of his squadron were entrusted with the undertaking. Starting at midnight, they arrived unperceived at the trenches, which they rushed with fixed bayonets. The Boers, though surprised, opened fire at once, killing six, wounding nine, and capturing two of their assailants, the rest of whom then scattered according to orders and retired to Mafeking under the guidance of two signal lights hoisted by the garrison. Although the Boers seem to have had only three casualties in this engagement, they were thoroughly unnerved by the surprise, and continued firing aimless volleys for some time after FitzClarence had retired. Moreover, for many months they did not reoccupy this trench.

Oct. 31. The attack on Cannon Kopje.

On the 31st Cronje made an attack on Cannon Kopje, the outpost to the south. The Boers called it *Babiaans* or Monkey Fort, because Baden-Powell had erected there one of the tall, iron wind-pumps, which are a common feature in South Africa, for a look-out man to climb up and report on the Boer movements. It was recognized by both sides as the key of Mafeking, for a Boer gun there could soon have reduced the town to dust. For some time previously the Boer artillery had been devoting a considerable amount of attention to this work, and not a day passed but it was severely shelled. Owing to the rocky ground Colonel Walford, who commanded the B.S.A.P. detachment in charge, could not construct any sort of shell-proof cover for his men in the fort itself, though he himself managed to scratch a hole between two stones close to the parapet about 8 feet long, 3 feet deep, and 3 feet broad, in which he lived

throughout the whole siege; however, he made a deep enough trench for his men in a small fold in the ground about forty yards in rear. The look-out man with one or two others and the Colonel were as a rule the fort's sole occupants. As daylight broke on the last morning in October, Cronje concentrated a very heavy cross-fire with his guns on Cannon Kopje. On the high ground to the south were to be seen several men holding a large number of riderless horses, the riders not being visible and evidently hidden in the long grass in front of them. As the light became better, from the town men could be seen rising and running forward and dropping in the grass. These were burghers of the Potchefstroom commando, which Cronje had chosen for the attack. During their advance a heavy artillery and rifle fire was directed on the fort, and the telephone connection with headquarters was cut. When they were within 400 yards, the shell fire still continuing, Colonel Walford called to his men to come from shelter and man the parapets. Though standing out practically without cover the little garrison of forty-five men opened with their magazines and two Maxims on the foremost line of Boers, who had hastily dug themselves a shallow trench from which they kept up a vigorous rifle fire. At the same time Baden-Powell, perceiving another party advancing more to the south-west, to take the fort in flank, opened fire on them from the town with two 7-pounders under Lieutenant Murchison. It only needed about five minutes of this gun play to check and disperse the enemy. The Boers rose all together out of the long grass, appeared for an instant to hesitate, formed one long thick line in a semi-circular formation round the kopje, and then turned and fled towards their horses. The little garrison, though still being shelled, continued their fire at the retreating mass till they were out of range. With the retreat of the enemy the garrison were again taken back to cover. The fight was over by 8.30 A.M., but the casualties were two officers (Captain Hon. Douglas H. Marsham and Captain Charles A. K. Pechell) and four men killed, and five men wounded. With the retreat of the Potchefstroom commando, the Rustenburgers, who had been preparing to attack

Mafeking on the other side, also retired. In this engagement the Boers lost more heavily than usual.

Finally, on November 7, Baden-Powell organized another night attack, this time on the western Boer laager, which had been recently moved up closer to their trenches. The conduct of the attack was entrusted to Major Godley with sixty of the Protectorate Regiment under Captain Vernon, thirty Bechuanaland Rifles under Captain Cowan, and three guns under Major Panzera. The Boer camp was surprised, but, on reinforcements arriving, Godley withdrew his force; his retirement was effectively covered by the Bechuanaland Rifles, who took up a position in Fort Ayr, and by a 7-pounder brought to the west of the stad. At a cost of only five casualties he had accomplished his object, since the Boer laager was moved farther away on the following night.

Nov. 7. Attack on the western laager.

Cronje so far had certainly not maintained his reputation for daring by these operations, and Pretoria and Johannesburg were beginning to chafe at his slowness. The newspapers, which had been given to understand that the capture of Mafeking would be a matter of only a few days, began to find all sorts of excuses for his failure. At one time it was said that he wished to clear out the men stated to be lying in wait for him in the women's laager before venturing on an attack, in spite of Baden-Powell's warning to him that the laager contained only women and children; at another that the dynamite mines round the town were the obstacle. On one day an attack was delayed because of the slippery state of the ground. Throughout Cronje showed an exaggerated fear of risking too many burghers' lives. At last, after he had been sitting in front of Mafeking for five weeks, the absurdity of wasting nearly a third of the two republics' available forces on the capture of one small town became obvious. On November 19 Cronje moved away with the Potchefstroom and Wolmaransstad commandos, the Scandinavians, and six of the guns, to take part in the more important operations in the neighbourhood of Kimberley. But there was no intention to raise the siege, for General Snyman was still left there in command of two or three thousand men of the Marico, Lichtenburg and Rusten-

Nov. 19. Cronje gives up the investment, leaving Snyman in charge.

burg commandos, the Long Tom and four other guns. This reduced force was spread out to take up the same positions that Cronje had held, and was quite strong enough to maintain the investing lines.

Snyman's conduct of the siege.

But if Cronje had shown a want of vigour in prosecuting the siege, Snyman was positively apathetic. In the words of a German eye-witness, "with touching patience and a truly classical repose he lay before Mafeking and passively allowed circumstances to occur." On the whole the Boers enjoyed the siege, which, unless they were attacked by the English, was little else than a pleasant picnic. A convenient service of coaches ran to Johannesburg, bringing them comforts and luxuries, and enabling them to relieve any monotony in the camp life by excursions to their homes or to a town. Their guns, the number of which was increased at the beginning of December by two more 5-pdrs. and a pom-pom sent from Pretoria, were an unfailing source of entertainment. Being able to work them out of range of any English guns, they felt perfect security in directing their fire on houses or other buildings in the town, so much so that it was not uncommon for the women who came to visit their relations in laager to be allowed to fire off a shell after the gun had been laid by the gunners. On Sundays, by mutual agreement with the defenders, there was a holiday, when the two sides would occasionally have friendly chats from one another's advanced trenches, and even exchange newspapers or whisky. The Boers were no doubt genuinely anxious to capture Mafeking, but they saw no reason to risk their own lives unnecessarily in the process. They had little fear of an early relief, and even if Plumer, who was giving them considerable trouble further north, succeeded in reaching Mafeking, they felt themselves numerous enough to hold him as well as Baden-Powell inside. They were therefore quite content to prevent the garrison escaping, and to leave their submission to the combined effects of hunger and persistent bombardment.

Mafeking's food supply taken over by the military.

For the garrison itself and the townspeople the greatest danger, when it became apparent that a relief could not be effected for several months, was that a spirit of slackness and

General J. P. Snyman.

General J. H. Olivier.

Comte De Villebois Mareuil.

Photo by Messy, Nice.

hopelessness might sap their energy or impair their watchfulness. The Boer bombardment, when the system of shelters had been thoroughly organised, was only harmful to buildings, not to human beings, except in the stad, where the natives could not be persuaded to adopt the precautions taken by the Europeans. The danger of actual starvation was small, thanks to the large supplies of food in the town, and to Baden-Powell's wisdom in taking over all stocks at a very early stage and rigidly controlling its distribution by his chief supply officer, Captain Ryan, A.S.C. There was naturally a good deal of discontent and grumbling at the restricted allowances, and when the town was at last relieved there was a considerable margin left; but considering the uncertainty, the Colonel would have laid himself open to reproach had he been less strict.*

* In his despatch on the siege Colonel Baden-Powell gives the following account of his arrangements for the food supply:—

"Early in the siege I took over all merchant stocks and put everybody on rations. Beginning on the usual scale, I gradually reduced it to the lowest that would allow of the men being fit for duty. During the latter part of the siege no extras of any kind were obtainable. All lived strictly on the following scale:—

Meat, at first 1 lb., latterly ¾ to 1 lb.
Bread, at first 1 lb., latterly 5 oz.
Vegetables, at first 1 lb., latterly 6 oz.
Coffee, at first ½ oz., latterly ⅓ oz.
Salt, at first ½ oz., latterly ½ oz.
Sugar, at first 2 oz. [latterly none].
Tea, at first ½ oz. [latterly none].
Sowens, latterly 1 quart.

"We had a large stock of meat, both live and tinned. For live-stock, we had to open up a wide extent of grazing ground. We ate the fresh meat first in order to avoid loss from enemy's fire, failure of grass and water, lung sickness, etc. The tinned meat we stored in bomb-proof chambers and kept as reserve.

"Our stocks of meal were comparatively small, but we had a large supply of forage oats. These we ground into flour, and fermented the residue into sowens (a form of porridge), and the remaining husks went as forage to the horses.

"Fresh vegetables were largely grown within the defences, and for a greater part of the siege formed a regular portion of the ration.

"The cost of feeding the troops was 1*s.* 3*d.* per ration, or, with fresh vegetables, 1*s.* 6*d.*; about 3*d.* below the contract price in peace. Civilians paid 2*s.*, and women in the laager 1*s.* 2*d.* All liquor was taken over and

Baden-Powell's devices for depressing the spirits of the Boers and keeping up those of the garrison.

But no precautions against danger from shell fire or against starvation would have availed, even against the lethargic hostilities of the Boers, without the spirit of pluck and endurance which animated all the defenders of this solitary outpost. And though it is true that in the enrolled troops, in the townspeople, and in most of the natives Baden-Powell had excellent material to work upon, yet this spirit was chiefly due to his own splendid example of calmness, resourcefulness, and courage. "B. P.," as he became familiarly known, not only in Mafeking, but throughout the Empire, seemed never to sleep. During the day he was at head-quarters, ready at the telephone for news from any of his outlying forts and trenches, or watching the movements of the enemy from his outlook post. At night he would go off by himself on the veld, spying out the Boer trenches or planning attacks or methods of deceiving the enemy and of keeping up the spirits of his own men. His devices for encouraging the enemy's nervousness were almost inexhaustible. He had some large megaphones manufactured, the chief use of which was to send bogus orders, audible to the Boers, about movements to threaten some of their trenches; dummy forts and dummy armoured trains were set up as baits, which proved most successful in attracting a great deal of Boer fire; on one occasion he armed some men with lances manufactured at the railway workshops, and conducted them round all the trenches well on the sky-line, in order to make the Boers believe that a detachment of the lancers, so dreaded since Elandslaagte, had secretly come in from the south to reinforce him. By repeating the

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issued in 'tots' to the troops on wet nights, and I think saved much sickness.

"Natives.—For the natives we established four soup kitchens, at which horse stew was sold daily, and five sowens kitchens. Natives were all registered, to prevent fraud, and bought rations at one quart per adult, and one pint per child, at 3*d.* per pint.

"Defence watchmen, workmen, police, etc., and certified destitute persons were given free rations. The kitchens so managed paid their own expenses.

"They were under Captain Wilson, A.D.C., with Mr. Myers as cash taker and inspector."

lamp signals previously used on the occasion of a night attack, he induced the Boers on another night to keep up aimless volleys at empty space from some of the trenches that seemed to be threatened; or he would annoy them and please the garrison by conveying a grandiloquent manifesto to their trenches under a flag of truce, offering the burghers a free pardon if they would return to their homes before he made up his mind to invade their country,* and by sending messages to Snyman telling him he would never capture Mafeking if he simply sat still and looked at it. On the other hand he relieved the intolerable monotony of the siege for the defenders by constantly finding some fresh occupation for them or subject of conversation. In his orders he would take them to a great extent into the secrets of the defence, making light of the Boer preparations and always confidently assuming that there was no cause for anxiety. A newspaper, *The Mafeking Mail*, was published regularly during the siege; entertainments, in which the Colonel took his share as a performer, baby-shows, horse-races and gymkhanas were organised. Special issues of stamps and paper money were authorised, which were as amusing as they were useful in supplying a dearth of ordinary stamps and small change; relief works were started for natives not employed in digging trenches or in scouting and too poor to pay for their rations, and every form of ingenuity was encouraged. Thus a traveller for a firm of acetylene gas manufacturers was discovered in the town, and employed in turning his knowledge to account in the production of searchlights; the women were set to make cartridge bags or nurse the sick and wounded; and the railway workshops were utilised for the manufacture of ammunition,

* Snyman himself sent a formal letter of protest against Baden-Powell's attempt to tamper with his men, and some of his Marico burghers sent the following reply, which entered more into the humour of the Colonel's proceedings:—"Sir, the burghers from Marico and elsewhere received your foolish notice with great surprise, as we have always regarded you as a man of education and patriotism, and also expected you to think the same of us. In conclusion, we wish to inform you that we are perfectly prepared to meet your troops, and that you must therefore let them loose as soon as possible.—Signed L. A. J. Botha, Peter D. Roux, Spencer R. Drake, and all the rest."

and even of a 6-in. howitzer, which fired an 18-lb. shell a distance of 4,000 yards. An old eighteenth century ship's gun, marked by a curious coincidence with the unknown maker's initials B. P., was unearthed and used to fire round shot with some success. Never was there any sign of panic or want of method; the garrison accounts and the food supply were organised on a system which would have been creditable in a time of profound peace; arrangements were made for preventing exaggerated claims for damage after the town had been relieved; and a court of summary jurisdiction was set up. The hospitals were as well managed as the meagre resources allowed, and, when typhoid and diphtheria broke out, precautions were at once adopted for isolating the cases.

Dec. 26. Attack on Game Tree fort.

During the last six weeks before Christmas Snyman kept drawing his investing lines closer, but nothing of much note occurred until Boxing-day, when an attack was delivered by the garrison on Eloff's fort at Game Tree Hill, which commanded an important grazing area for cattle; a further reason for attempting its capture was that, being the only fort due north of the town, its possession would be of the greatest advantage if at any time a column from the north should attempt to push its way through to the relief. This fort, as far as could be seen, was simply a breastwork of sandbags with some kind of shelter behind, and the permanent garrison was thought to number about forty, but, owing to Commandant Snyman's custom of giving men passes to go home from time to time, the actual garrison—especially at Christmas time—was supposed to be less. The armoured train was ordered to move along the line to the north, and the attacking force, consisting of three guns, two Maxims and 150 men, with one gun and 110 men in support, to parade at 2 A.M. on Boxing-day, the right wing being under the command of Major Godley, the left under Colonel Hore, with Major Panzera in command of the guns. The guns took up a position 1,400 yards south-west of the fort, and the armoured train crept out as far as it could go, but not so far as had been intended, for it was found that the line had been freshly destroyed to the left rear of the enemy's work. To the right of the line, and almost abreast of the armoured train, were

the Bechuanaland Rifles, posted to act as a flanking party, while the assaulting party, consisting of two squadrons of the Protectorate Regiment, advanced along the railway line and lay down in the grass about 200 yards in rear of the armoured train. They were here completely hidden from view. The orders to the several units were that the guns and armoured train were to open a heavy cross-fire on the Boer fort at daybreak, and continue it until the assaulting party, under Captain Vernon, had advanced to within 200 yards of the fort. Unfortunately by some misunderstanding Captain Vernon gave the signal for the guns to cease fire when he was still 1,200 yards from his destination. Moreover, there happened at the time to be a double guard at the fort, as the day guard had just arrived to relieve the night watch. Vernon's advance was over ground without a vestige of cover, but it was carried on unhesitatingly under very hot fire right up to the Boer position. Even then, though at point-blank range, a gallant attempt was made to storm it; some of the attackers climbed on to the roof, but were unable to get inside, and others fired into the loopholes. But the odds were too strong; Captains Vernon and Sandford and Lieutenant Paton, the three officers of the squadron, were shot dead, and half the men fell dead or wounded; Captain FitzClarence, then coming up with the supporting squadron, was also wounded; but it was not until Lieutenant Swinburne, who took his place, had made another fruitless effort to enter the redoubt that the whole party fell back. But they did not finally retire on Mafeking until orders had come from Baden-Powell. The losses had been considerable, amounting to 3 officers and 19 men killed, 1 officer and 23 men wounded, and 3 men taken prisoners, as against only eleven casualties of the Boers; but the attack was not wasted, for it proved both to Boers and British that the garrison was still quite ready to take the offensive.

Jan. and Feb. 1900. The Boers driven further back in the brickfields and other quarters.

During January and February, when the town itself was felt to be completely secure, the garrison began gradually pushing their opponents further away from their own first line of defence. The principal area of fighting was the brick-fields, where the Boers seemed very securely established. Gangs

of natives were employed by the base commandant, Colonel Vyvyan, who had by this time given up the command of the Town Guard to Major Goold-Adams, in pushing out a series of parallels, connecting works, and sapping trenches towards the Boer intrenchments. The covering parties and occupants of the English trenches were Browne's and Marsh's Cape Police and the coloured contingent under Captain Goodyear and Sergeant Currie. Almost inch by inch these men worked their way out, driving the Boers before them and at last forcing them to abandon their main redoubt, 1,700 yards from the town, and retire to a position 1,000 yards farther back. During the whole period there was an almost continuous rifle fire going on, more especially at night, when both sides had their working parties employed; the firing then used to become particularly heavy, volley after volley following in quick succession for minutes at a time, then lapsing into comparative quietude, only to be followed before very long by a fresh outburst. For about a fortnight the trenches of the enemy and those of the garrison were not more than sixty yards apart, and the sniping parties on both sides acquired an almost personal liking for their opponents, with whom they exchanged conversation as well as shots.

At the same time that efforts were being made to drive back the Boer occupants in the brickfields further works were undertaken in other directions. To the north-east, near the convent, the Bechuanaland Rifles pushed out a trench close to one occupied by the Boers and made them evacuate it. To the north, along the line, the Railway division, under Captain More, constructed an advanced work. To the west Major Godley perfected the small advanced redoubt called Fort Ayr. On the south-west the natives managed, by constant sniping, to compel the Boers to evacuate their foremost work, Fort Cronje, and eventually succeeded in occupying and holding it until the end. To the south-east, between Cannon Kopje and the river, was constructed an advanced trench for the Nordenfelt gun which, in the hands of Sergeant Lowe, an old naval gunner, often engaged the Boer 94-pdr. with great effect, and finally succeeded in killing their chief artillerist with eight or ten men

and in compelling the Boers to move the gun to a safer quarter.

March. The rigour of the investment relaxed.

On February 28 a determined attempt was made by the Boers to retake what they had lost in the brickfields, but they were beaten off, and on March 22nd they finally abandoned the whole of that area. A dynamite mine which they had left in one of their trenches was fortunately discovered before any harm was done. During the next month the Boers began gradually withdrawing some of their men and guns, including the 94-pdr., and Baden-Powell, who was becoming anxious about the food supply of the natives, was able to send out several parties of them to Kanya,* though he was not so successful in securing the mobs of cattle which Plumer attempted to drive through the Boer lines.

News of relief.

By this time relief was almost within sight. Throughout the siege runners had kept the garrison fitfully informed as to the state of affairs both north and south, and news had occasionally been sent out of Mafeking.† On February 6 a message had come from Lord Roberts asking the garrison to hold out till the middle of May, and an answer had been sent back by Baden-Powell saying that they could hold out till the 22nd of that month; by the beginning of May it was known that Mahon was starting with his relief column.‡ Many of the Boers had already moved off, and the remainder seemed very quiet. The garrison, therefore, were hardly expecting any more engagements before seeing Mahon. But at 4 A.M. on the morning of May 12 very heavy firing was opened from the Boer trenches on the east of the town. The English detachments, to whom that quarter was assigned, were immediately

May 12. Eloff's attack on the stad.

* See chap. vi., p. 208.

† Before the beginning of the siege Lady Sarah Wilson, the wife of Captain Wilson, Baden-Powell's A.D.C., had gone to Setlagoli, whence she sent much useful information to Mafeking. But finding her position precarious on attempting to return, she had been captured by Snyman, who only allowed her to enter Mafeking on receiving in exchange one Viljoen, a Dutchman confined in Mafeking gaol for horse-stealing and spying.

‡ See chap. vi., p. 219, for Lieutenant Morrison's report to Mahon, and Mahon's answer to Baden-Powell.

ordered to stand to their arms. At first it was thought that the enemy was advancing, but from the stationary position of the flashes from their rifles it was soon seen that there was no movement on their part, and the incident was put down to one of the usual night alarms. In about half an hour the firing began to die away, and at 5 A.M. ceased entirely, but almost immediately rifle-shots were again heard, this time in the direction of Hidden Hollow on the south-west, followed by some cheering. Shortly afterwards flames were seen to be issuing from the huts in the native stad. A party of Boers had advanced along the bed of the river cautiously and quietly, until challenged by the sentry over the Cossack Post, detached from and about 400 yards in advance of Hidden Hollow Fort. The sentry, on discovering with whom he had to deal, fired upon them, whereupon they promptly returned the fire. The three men of the Cossack Post then retired, firing as they went, in order to alarm the garrison of Hidden Hollow Fort, which consisted of fifteen men of A squadron Protectorate Regiment under Lieutenant R. W. Waller. The Boers thereupon dashed straight on into the stad, passing between Hidden Hollow and Limestone Forts without attempting to capture either, and immediately set light to some of the nearest huts.

This attacking party was led by Field-cornet Eloff. He had recently returned from a visit to his grandfather, the President, who had given him instructions to take Mafeking at all costs. Snyman had shown no great enthusiasm for the undertaking, but had allowed Eloff to make the attempt with 700 men, including forty foreigners, under Captain Weiss, and had promised to support him if he succeeded in entering Mafeking. Of these 700 only 225 had presented themselves at the meeting-place at 2 A.M. on the 12th, but Eloff had determined to pursue the undertaking, and, under the guidance of two Kaffirs and a deserter from the Protectorate Regiment, had, for the first time during the siege, penetrated Baden-Powell's inner lines. Eloff made two mistakes at the outset in omitting to capture Hidden Hollow and Limestone Forts, which blocked his line of retreat, and in thoroughly arousing the garrison by setting fire to the stad.

Immediately the Boers were discovered to be on the outskirts of the town the alarm was sounded, and the garrison turned out joyfully at the prospect of a fight. For long they had been waiting for so good a chance of coming to close quarters with their enemies, and from their faces it might have been thought that it was a relieving force rather than an assailant within their gates. Even the women and children shared in the excitement, and the prisoners in the gaol were allowed to shoulder a rifle for the defence. But, in spite of the hurry, there was no confusion, and each man fell into his appointed place with hardly a word. An inner defence line between the stad and the European town was formed by the reserves of the Bechuanaland Rifles, of the Town Guard, and of the Railway division.

Elation of the garrison.

Meanwhile the Boers, after setting fire to the stad, had divided into two equal parties. One remained in the stad and proceeded to loot, the other, under Eloff himself, rushed forward to Colonel Hore's headquarters, manned by two officers and fifteen troopers besides Hore himself. Before Eloff's superior numbers Hore was forced to surrender, and he and his men were thrust into a room of the fort, which Eloff prepared to hold until he received the promised reinforcements.

Eloff captures Hore's headquarters.

Major Godley, in charge of the western defences, promptly posted Captain FitzClarence's and Captain Lord Charles Bentinck's squadrons in such positions as to cut off the Boers left in the stad from Eloff's detachment, and with a small party of Cape Police and a Maxim drove off a half-hearted attempt by Snyman to reinforce the assailants. The Boers in the stad had taken refuge in a kraal and on a small kopje, but by the evening twenty-seven of them had been taken prisoners and the rest driven off. Meanwhile Baden-Powell had been bringing all available men to surround the Boers in the old Police Fort. Eloff sent off two orderlies to inform Snyman of his position, but they were shot by Godley's men on their way to the river. Snyman made some effort to support Eloff with gun fire, but, being uncertain of his exact position, was afraid to send his shells far into the town. Some of Eloff's men, towards evening, escaped from the fort, but

Eloff and 97 prisoners captured by the evening.

he himself, with the majority, held out bravely till the evening, when he rushed into the room where Hore was confined and surrendered with his party to his own prisoners, on condition that the firing should cease. Shortly afterwards Baden-Powell came up, asked Eloff to dinner, and had the remaining ninety-seven prisoners marched off under guard. Besides prisoners the Boers also lost eight killed and twenty-eight wounded on this day.

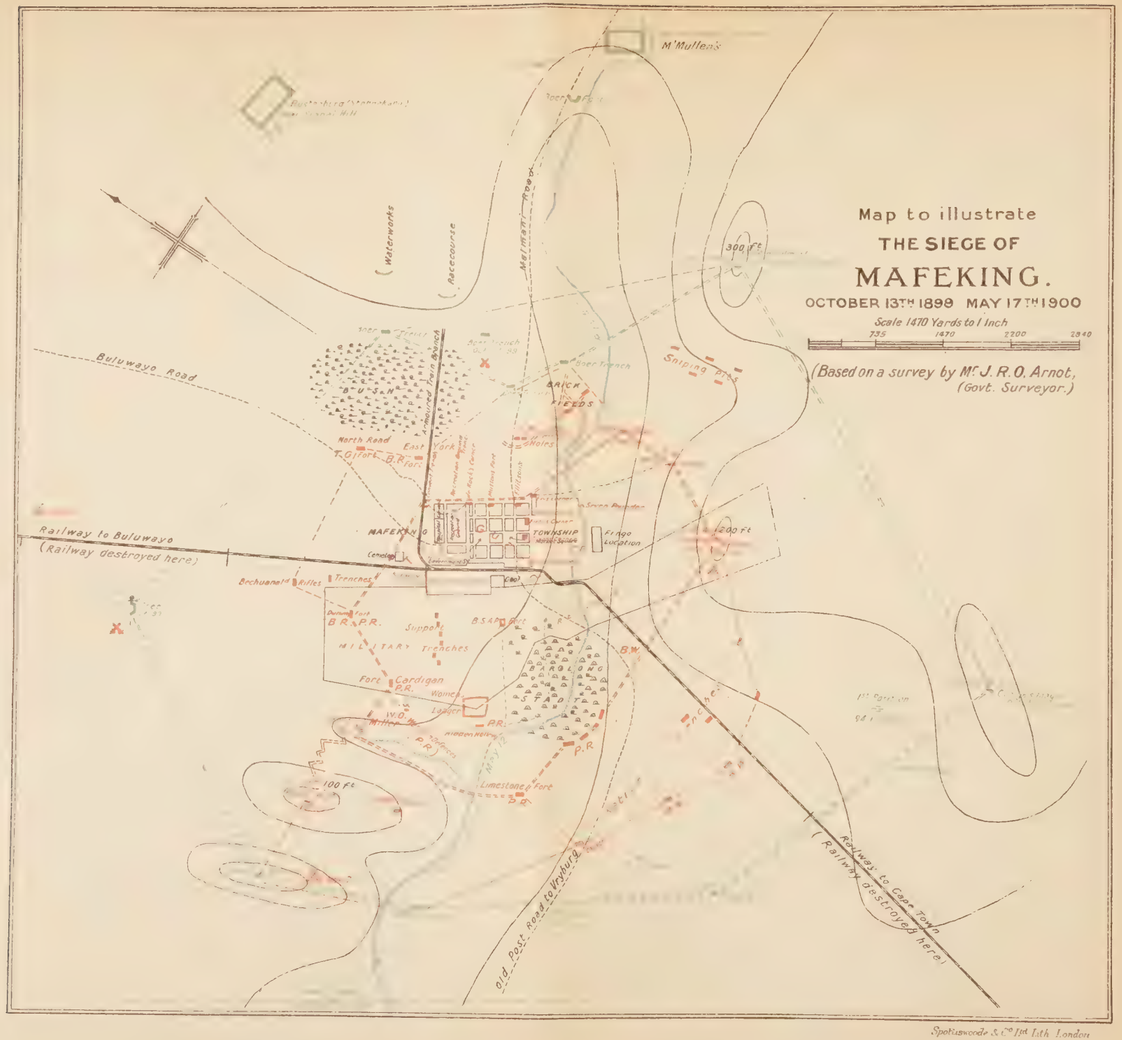
May 17. The relief.

On the following day the Town Guard was re-armed with the captured Mausers, and on the 15th a message was received to say that Colonel Mahon and Colonel Plumer had joined hands at Jan Massibi, twenty-two miles away to the west, and would make a combined movement towards Mafeking next day. On the morning of the 16th a carrier-pigeon arrived from Colonel Plumer with a message saying that the two columns had started at daylight that morning. In expectation of the relief, about 12 o'clock every elevated position was seized by the expectant garrison, and at about 1.30 their sight was gladdened by the bursting of a shell some seven miles away. This was followed in rapid succession by others, each one bursting nearer and nearer, and showing that the advance was still proceeding. Then Boers were seen retiring from one position to another, and at last, at about 4 P.M., there suddenly flashed from one of the black masses seen in the distance the flicker of a heliograph. It took some little time for signallers to send an answering flash, in reply to which came the message, "From Colonel Mahon's force,—How are you getting on." This was replied to by the word "Welcome." During the afternoon a few poor horses were collected to enable some mounted men and two 7-pdr. guns to demonstrate in Mahon's direction. About dusk the relief column could just be seen about six miles off; they were slowly advancing, the enemy still retiring before them. At 7 P.M. Major Karri Davis, of the Imperial Light Horse, and about ten men marched in, to the frenzied delight of the inhabitants. At 4 A.M. the next morning the whole column came in without any further opposition, and Mafeking was relieved.

The dramatic capture of Eloff was a fitting close to this

DIRECTIONS

- Trenches - Original line of British defence
- Do Subsequent " " "
- Do Original line of Boer investment
- Do Subsequent " " "
- Forts
- P.R. ..... Protectorate Regt
- B.S.A.P. .. British South African Police
- B.R. ..... Bechuanaland Rifles
- B.W. ..... "Black Watch"
- T.G. ..... Town Guard
- H.Q.W.D. .. Headquarters, Western Defences
- C.P. ..... Cape Police.



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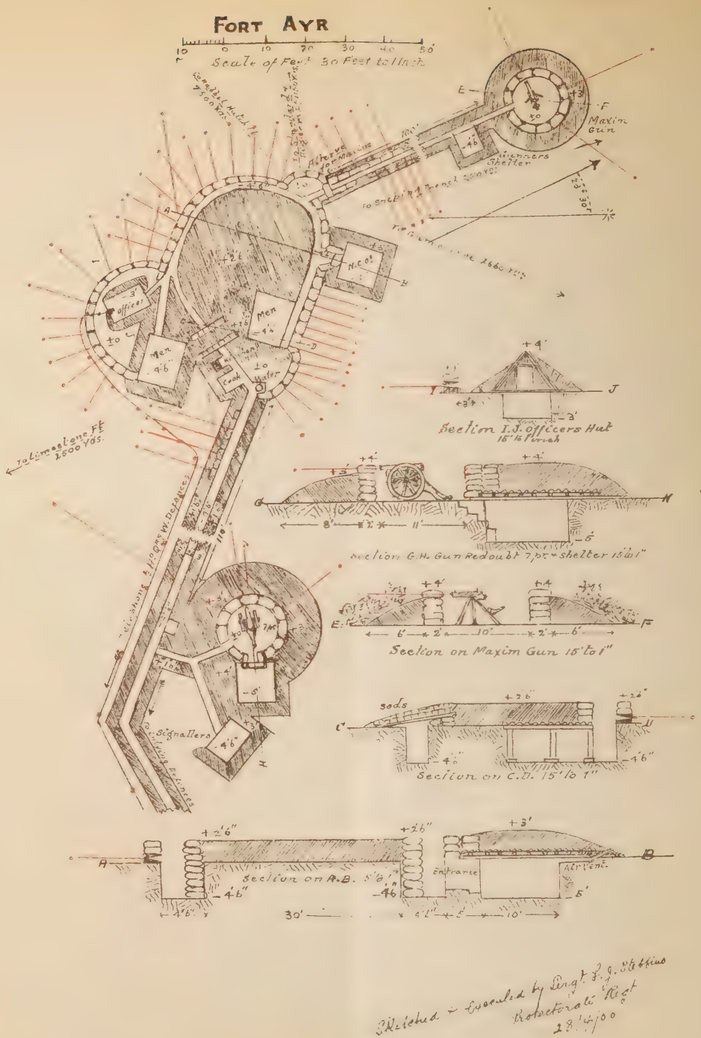

extraordinary siege, in which, though invested and unable to escape, the defenders were throughout far more aggressive than their assailants. Kruger, on hearing of Snyman's failure to co-operate with Eloff, wrote to ask if it was due to drunkenness; but really Snyman's conduct on this occasion was quite of a piece with the whole conduct of the siege both by himself and Cronje. There is no doubt that during the first month, when the defences were incomplete, Cronje could easily have taken the town by a resolute attack with his superior numbers and artillery. Later it might have been difficult, though even at the last Eloff's gallant attempt showed that if such an attack had been well supported from all sides Mafeking might have fallen. Baden-Powell justly gained immense credit for his plucky defence. It appealed to Englishmen's delight in a good game played with boundless audacity. Merely as an example of what can be accomplished in war by ingenuity and a bold front, this defence was worth accomplishing; and Baden-Powell did more, for he kept nearly 10,000 Boers idle during the first most critical month of the war for England, and during the whole seven months never less than 2000, at a cost to the English of only 35 killed, 101 wounded, and 27 prisoners.*

The value of the defence to England.

* The Boer losses have been estimated on good authority at 300.

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